

# **Horizon**

**A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART**

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## **NOVELIST-PHILOSOPHERS—VII**

**CHODERLOS DE LACLOS AND 'LES LIAISONS  
DANGÉREUSES'**

*by* MARTIN TURNELL

**PAUL DELVAUX**

*by* CAMILLE GOEMANS

## **WAR AND PEACE—II**

**I—BUILDING ALIVE**

**II—SOMETHING TERRIBLE, SOMETHING LOVELY**

*by* WILLIAM SANSOM

## **FRAGMENT OF AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY—XV**

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REVIEWS *by* ANNA KAVAN *and* SONIA BROWNELL

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# HORIZON

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# COMMENT

‘HORIZON—oh no zir!’ The only anagram which the word can produce (correct me if I am right) sums up the comment of our many thousand enemies. For we have enemies, and it is fitting to start a new year by squaring up to them. Here is what Edmund Wilson says in the *New Yorker* about these creatures.

‘HORIZON has been a remarkable magazine and Mr. Connolly an exceptional editor. It seemed to me a proof of his merit, when I was in London at the end of the war, that, in the political and literary worlds, everybody complained about him and it but that everybody, at the same time, seemed to some degree dependent on them.’

‘Everybody complained’—but that means *you*, ‘*hypocrite lecteur*’, ungrateful swine! So that is how you talk when our back is turned!

‘People in London used to complain’, he continues, ‘that Cyril Connolly was out of key with the wartime state of mind’—complain of the author of ‘Letter from a Civilian’ which reflected the wartime state of mind more closely than a thousand Gallups! Then they will complain of anything!

I put it to you, miserable readers, that complaining has become your second nature, off with your nears! and that the over-indulgence of that dismal faculty has reduced you to a peevish back-biting state in which you are incapable of reacting to any æsthetic or intellectual stimuli, in which you have forfeited your right to happiness, and sunk beneath the pleasure principle into a morose and carping esurience.

We will now deal with some particular complaints. ‘HORIZON has gone off’—‘And left you behind, I fear’—‘It’s above my head’—Ah! your head, reader? What recent gains in sensibility have you to register? Do you read or think as much as you used to? You are aware no doubt that your consumption of tobacco and alcohol has practically doubled, you will pay two hundred and fifty pounds for a hideous leather armchair which Ribbentrop may have sat in, you will plank down three quid for a bottle of Scotch, you can’t be trusted with a railway towel or a piece of hotel soap, the club nail-scissors have to be kept on a chain, you’ll queue a mile for a black market lipstick, you talk about ‘putting the vedge in the fridge’, and smoke all through meals, your



manners are dreadful, you're full of hate against other countries, you talk of Frogs, and Yanks and Wogs, and write to *The Times* against Picasso; you're more anti-Semitic, even, than before. You think you are a cultivated person yet you don't know who built the house you live in, and can you honestly say that you would rather have your child turn into Baudelaire than Lord Nuffield? You've probably had a manuscript sent back to you recently. I thought so. It might interest you to know that the psychosomatic branch of this paper is making a study of 'Rejectee mentality', and is finding out some interesting things about you. Anything more to say?

Ah, here we have our most fee-rocious critic, Mr. Julian Symons, the fox without a tail.

'HORIZON was born in January 1940. It printed all sorts of work, by writers with all sorts of beliefs: but it avoided conspicuously the two most interesting literary movements of our time—the movement towards methodological criticism represented by Yvor Winters, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and some other American writers, and the movement towards the *literary* left, of those who experimented in the twenties and early thirties in the dangerous medium of *words*. The most notable thing about this bland and cultured magazine, indeed, was the maintenance of its editions at a standard of gentlemanliness hardly approached by any editor of a serious literary paper in the last twenty years. HORIZON was a neo-Georgian literary paper with modernist overtones: its sire may have been the *Criterion*, but its dam was certainly the *London Mercury*.' (In *Now*, 5.)

'HORIZON, it may be said, is in England and in wartime the head and shoulders of this movement to keep art going: a movement which to some of us seems today merely banal and disgusting.' (In *Focus one*.)

In *Partisan Review* he tells the Americans even more plainly what he thinks. 'The Editor of the quite frankly belles-lettrist HORIZON, who prints odd fag-ends of the Twenties . . . bound together by no organized view of Life or Society, no stronger thread than his own erratic intelligence and whimsical Barryesque good taste.'

Mr. Julian Symons, brother of the author, and formerly the ardent admirer of Wyndham Lewis, to whom he sacrificed a whole number of his short-lived *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, is a critic of considerable acumen, driven forward by the spur of envious

animosity, like his master. I call him a fox without a tail because he is the leader of the art-hating school of Left-wing writers, and always at his best when prophesying the ruin of art, literature, and the 'virtuoso trapeze artists' who practise them. 'The arts are disintegrating,' he exclaims in *Now*. 'The objective of art today is to divert attention from the class struggle,' 'The intelligentsia who try to nurture the coy bloom of art as we know it are tending a dying flower.' In *Crisis and Dismay*, his article in *Focus one*: he attacks the writers of the thirties for failing in their task.

'It was symbolically much, no doubt, that Auden and Isherwood should become ambulance drivers in Spain during the Civil War, that Spender should work at Barcelona radio-station and Day Lewis write a sonnet beginning "Why do we all, seeing a Communist feel small". But practically it was not very much.'

Isherwood never went to Spain, Auden was never an ambulance driver, nor Spender an announcer—even the line of Day Lewis is misquoted—so perhaps the attack on them is not worth very much either. Or am I being methodological?

'The highest kind of creative work likely to be written today,' insinuates the fox, 'will be satiric: taking as a base the visible world and commenting on it with violence and hatred.' There is time for one more quotation before plunging back into the class struggle: a fox's prayer. 'If we stand on the side of "progress" we may find it necessary as William Morris suspected, to resign art altogether. . . . A transition might take place, more or less gradually in individual cases, to a situation in which the writing of creative literature in any way satisfactory to the artist seemed increasingly difficult and even unimportant; that will be the point at which the creative artist who is also an honest man will lay down his pen. This consummation would grieve all artists, and be death to some: but the transition from the bourgeois art of the last three hundred years to any possible Socialist art of the future will not be made without such sacrifices.'

May I suggest that Mr. Symons, who is, I feel sure, as honest as he is creative, sets us an example, like a good Socialist, and makes that great sacrifice here and now?

---

The HORIZON prize for 1945 is awarded to Dylan Thomas for his poems in the January, February, October, and the French numbers.

PIERRE EMMANUEL

## POÈMES A HÖLDERLIN

Le sommeil enchanté glace le vallon vert  
 le ciel a la couleur naïve des légendes.  
 Un château figurant la mort hante les airs  
 comme un long cri de solitude sur la lande.  
 Morte les yeux noyés d'iris et de sarcelles,  
 le sein nu rehaussé de sang sur le brocart  
 elle est reine à jamais par la splendeur cruelle  
 des pieds blancs sur la pourpre et l'âme du poignard.  
 Un chasseur vert visant l'ombre d'une palombe  
 tourne sans fin, guettant au vaste ciel des tombes  
 le point pur où l'oiseau va surplomber la plaie,  
 Cependant qu'au lit noir à baldaquin se pose  
 O clair miroir celant le crime, ton reflet  
 d'or pâle entre les seins où se fige une rose.

## MÉMOIRE DE DIOTIMA

La cloche vient de loin, légère est la mémoire  
 allégresse du promeneur quand vient le soir!  
 Les derniers monts, bordant les heures les plus claires  
 y dessinent la ligne sûre des pensées,  
 mais vois: l'immense ciel trop lucide, une étoile  
 y tremble à te serrer le cœur. Là-bas, là-bas  
 le souvenir, de ses géantes ombres pâles  
 déplace lentement les plaines vers tes pas...  
 Si tendres sont les variantes de ce monde  
 Sur un fond de tristesse étrange et de forêts!  
 Très haut s'éloignent les regrets. Le goût des larmes  
 dans la douceur du ciel sans visage se fond:  
 Que j'apprenne à manger ce ciel comme je mange  
 ce pain, dit le passant. Te prie: le vent naît  
 de tout l'espace sur son âme. Son oreille  
 recueille la rumeur paisible des hameaux.  
 A la cime du monde, une chapelle où pendent  
 les guirlandes d'un autre été. Des noms obscurs  
 y perdurent dans l'immuable solitude  
 cœurs malhabiles et profonds. Entre eux fleurit  
 rose écarlate sur les siècles! un cœur sombre  
 dont seul le voyageur saura le nom, de nuit.



## LA MORT DE HÖLDERLIN

Quarante ans tu luttas avec l'ombre à tes pieds  
avant de consentir tout entier à la terre:  
tu es sans ombre enfin. O front nocturne! en toi  
se lit la profondeur des astres. Les mains jointes  
s'accolent comme deux tourterelles blessées,  
et, tournés vers la mer, les pieds sereins reposent  
longtemps errants. Le corps glisse au large: un oiseau  
qui le suivait revient lourdement à la rive,  
le visage d'un bleu sans défaut reste seul  
midi sans borne où dieu se tait sous la paupière  
(comme le monde est nu en ce visage clos!)  
En haut l'orage s'amoncelle: l'air se timbre  
de cloches, d'anges clairs en allés vers les limbes  
l'odeur des foins monte des terres menacées  
où les derniers faneurs se hâtent. Sur la route  
cahote le convoi du pauvre entre les blés.  
Une tombe baignée dans le chant des cigales,  
en plein vent. Quelques croix. De l'herbe sur les noms.  
O le plus humble entre les humbles! Un petit nombre  
de cœurs purs fait silence en cercle autour de toi.  
La girouette du clocher tourne trois fois  
messagère de la nuée: mais à peine  
es-tu couché la face à nu dans le tombeau,  
le rayon confondant vient toucher ta paupière,  
éveillant le soleil scellé de l'au-delà.

PIERRE JEAN JOUVE

## L'ESPÉRANCE

*Léger aérostat, ô divine Espérance...*

CHARLES MERYON

### I

Une masse de cœur, une armée de l'amour  
 Dans la fosse et la capitale de douleur!  
 L'Espérance n'a pas son œil de regard clair  
 D'un ciel de fleuve qu'elle pressent: mais l'histoire

De ses yeux c'est le vide immuable et contraire  
 C'est le vent c'est l'absence et que jamais son heure  
 Ne soit venue! avec la poudre et le volcan  
 De révolution, le feu la flamme d'or!

Oh les pierres brûlées! Oh la mort, oh le nu  
 A tous bras impossible et les hanches fermées  
 Oh le non! le martyre et l'envie et l'enjeu  
 Le pouvoir inconnu!

Elle n'a pas vécu, elle est plus tout entière  
 Tendue à l'amoureux sacrifice, ô besoin  
 Elle aime! elle est en chair d'une substance amère  
 Elle aime et elle attend sans reconnaître rien.

### II

La perdition d'âme c'est  
 Avoir, et la promesse d'âme  
 C'est perdre car le Rien surmonte la cité  
 Et vois le soleil à l'aurore il blesse l'or

Le Rien contient croyances et ombrages  
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## L'ESPÉRANCE

II

Seuls qu'on puisse tracer en une chair coupable  
La grandeur de notre ombre est gagner la clarté  
La splendeur de douceur est n'avoir plus une ombre.

### III

Le combat tonne interminablement et croule  
L'esprit s'est déplacé jusqu'à toucher la tombe  
Autant que l'homme est là la guerre sera longue  
Personne n'a jamais vu clair dans les combats

Je t'aime espoir! et la muraille de la honte  
Et l'opprobre subi! Espoir comme Bara  
Tu gis nu dans le chemin creux de notre combe  
La cocarde d'espoir aux dents mortes de froid.

### IV

Ta puissance nous fut donnée ô ma vertu  
Théologale, et nous aimâmes tes seins chastes  
Nous fûmes enrichis; et pour nous inconnus  
Attendîmes la Bonté innocente et vaste

Non pour elle, pour nous, bas reflets du vrai Dieu  
Miroirs incandescents eaux remplies de l'abîme  
Pierres calcinées et tournées contre le feu  
Profonds contre nature et le Christ à la cime.



# NOVELIST-PHILOSOPHERS-VII

## CHODERLOS DE LACLOS AND 'LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES'

MARTIN TURNELL

### I

TOWARDS the end of March 1782 polite society in Paris received a considerable shock. The *Mercure de France* announced among the spring publications '*Les liaisons dangereuses, ou lettres recueillies dans une société et publiées pour l'instruction de quelques autres.*' The book was signed only by the initials of the author and purported to have been published at Amsterdam, though it could be obtained from Durand *neveu*, a fashionable Parisian bookseller.

The public was not deceived either by the initials or by the high moral claims made by the author in his Preface. It was known to be the work of a forty-one-year-old artillery officer, Pierre-Ambroise-François Choderlos de Laclos. According to his biographers, he was an 'homme vertueux, bon fils, bon père, excellent époux'. Four years after the publication of the *Liaisons* he got into serious trouble with the military authorities when his entry for the essay competition on Vauban, which was nothing short of an *éreintement* of that celebrity, cost him his commission. He devoted some years to politics as secretary to the Duke of Orléans, returned to the Army in 1792 and died at Taranto in 1803, a General in Napoleon's armies.

A good case can be made for treating Laclos as a moralist and Baudelaire has declared roundly, in his tantalizingly brilliant notes on the *Liaisons*,<sup>1</sup> that it is 'un livre de moraliste aussi haut que les plus élevés, aussi profond que les plus profonds'. Laclos may have been a reformer at heart as he may have believed sincerely that

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres posthumes*, Paris, 1908, pp. 173-186; *Œuvres complètes*, T. II. (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), Paris, 1932, pp. 432-440. (The notes are not included in Crépet's edition of Baudelaire.)

Vauban's theories of defence were mistaken, but he was not altogether the detached critic that he pretended. There is no doubt that in publishing the *Liaisons* he intended to cause a commotion as there is no doubt that the essay on Vauban was intended to set the military experts by the ears.

He must have succeeded better than he expected and seems to have been surprised by the violence of the reactions that he provoked. The *Liaisons* were read by everyone and were discussed in all the salons, but the people who read him with most passion shut their doors in his face, and though Marie-Antoinette had a copy of the novel in her library, she took care to have the title and the author's name removed from the cover of the book. We may wonder why a society which had been brought up on the works of the *libertins*, had applauded the *Sopha* of Crébillon fils and the *Poésies érotiques* of the Chevalier de Parny, should have reacted so violently to the *Liaisons* which are most certainly neither erotic nor obscene. 'Je ne suis pas surprise qu'un fils de M. de Choderlos écrive bien', said Mme Riccoboni in a letter to the author. 'L'esprit est héréditaire dans sa famille; mais je ne puis le féliciter d'employer ses talents, sa facilité, les grâces de son style à donner aux étrangers une idée si révoltante des mœurs de sa nation et du goût de ses compatriotes.'

The answer is that Laclos let the cat out of the bag. His book is, as Baudelaire said, 'un livre d'histoire', and because it was so it was also an immense *trahison* which told the whole world exactly how French society spent its time, shattered the illusion created by the salacious little fairy tales of contemporary erotic writers which were popular precisely because they were a smoke-screen which concealed the exploits of the aristocracy from the rest of the world. Instead of the pastoral dream, 'dans ce nouveau miroir, bergers pimpants et tendres bergères apparaissent avec des faces criminelles: traits livides et creux, yeux chargés de haine, lèvres sifflantes; des serpents entourent leurs houlettes. Cependant ils se reconnaissent si ressemblants qu'ils ne pouvaient détacher de cette nouvelle image leurs regards épouvantés.'<sup>1</sup>

This explains the consternation of Laclos' contemporaries, and the preoccupation with sexual intrigue may also explain why some modern critics of the French novel are inclined to pay a

<sup>1</sup> Emile Dard, *Le Général Choderlos de Laclos, auteur des Liaisons dangereuses, 1741-1803*, nouvelle éd. Paris, 1936, p. 2.

timid and embarrassed tribute to this 'beau livre' before hurrying on with obvious relief to some milder and more genteel writer. It does not explain why 'même aujourd'hui, les *Liaisons* demeurent le seul roman français qui vous donne l'impression du danger, sur la couverture duquel semble nécessaire l'étiquette le réservant à l'usage externe. A cent cinquante ans de distance son usage interne attaque, ronge . . .'.<sup>1</sup> It is like many great works, a 'betrayal' not simply of an age, but of human nature itself.

## II

In one of his letters Laclos describes *Clarissa Harlowe* as a 'chef-d'œuvre des hommes', and it was from Richardson that he borrowed his method. The novel written in the form of letters was one of the literary conventions of the time, but it was a convention which was peculiarly suited to his purpose. For, leaving aside the moralists, Laclos was one of the first great analysts of the human heart. In saying this I am not forgetting Baudelaire's observation on 'la puissance de l'analyse racinienne' nor the *Princesse de Clèves*; but analysis is a term which can only be applied to the imaginative writers of the seventeenth century with the greatest circumspection. 'C'est à la poésie, à elle seule que seront toujours réservées la navigation et la découverte'.<sup>2</sup> Giraudoux's comment is an overstatement of an important truth. There is, properly speaking, no such thing as analysis in the seventeenth-century dramatists. Their discoveries are the product of intuition, of sudden insight into the workings of the human mind which enables them to reveal feelings which are still inarticulate:

'Déjà même je crois entendre la réponse

Qu'en secret contre moi votre haine prononce'.

There is, to be sure, something to which we can scarcely deny the name of psychological analysis in the elucidation of the moral problem at the end of the *Princesse de Clèves*, but for the most part the novelist uses the method of the dramatists and the novel of psychological analysis is the invention of the eighteenth century. For it is not until the eighteenth century that the novelist sits back and deliberately takes his mind to pieces. Now there are important differences between a novel like the *Liaisons* and a

<sup>1</sup> Jean Giraudoux, *Littérature*, Paris, 1941, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Giraudoux, *op. cit.*, p. 65.



nineteenth-century novel like *Adolphe*. The *solitary* destructive analysis of *Adolphe* is the nineteenth century's distinctive contribution. The seventeenth century had tried to answer the question: 'What is Man?' The nineteenth century tried to answer the question: 'What sort of a man am I?' The novelist explained the causes of his feelings and passed judgement on them, provoking a conflict which ended by paralysing action and destroying him. Laclos' aim and method are different. He is interested not in thought, but in action, in answering the question: 'How must I act in order to . . .?' The letter-writer supposes an audience and at once we have the formative influence of society. He only discusses those feelings which interest other people as well as himself. There is no analysis for its own sake; all analysis issues in action, for the writer only takes his mind to pieces in order to fit himself for living. The letters of which the novel is constructed are a series of monologues which makes it very easy to mark the contrast between the different characters, to weave the pattern which consists of contacts between different points of view, reactions to different situations.

The theme of the *Liaisons dangereuses* is sexual intrigue in the eighteenth century or rather sexual intrigue is chosen as the means of revealing the fundamental antagonisms underlying society. Sexual relations are examined in all their subtle ramifications so that we close the book with the feeling that we have a document of singular completeness and veracity on this particular aspect of society.

At the beginning of the book Mme de Volanges is making preparations for the marriage of her daughter, Cécile—'type parfait de la détestable jeune fille, niaise et sensuelle', observes Baudelaire bitterly—to the Comte de Gercourt. Now Gercourt has had the misfortune or the *maladresse* to wound the sexual vanity of the two principal characters, the Vicomte de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil (who were themselves formerly lovers) by abandoning the Marquise for the Intendante de . . . who leaves the Vicomte to become his mistress. They plan revenge. Valmont sets to work not simply to seduce, but to debauch Cécile, who after a miscarriage retires to a convent. Mme de Merteuil seduces Cécile's young man, the Chevalier de Danceny, who retires to celibacy and the Knights of Malta. A large part of the book is devoted to Valmont's assault on the chaste and

pious Présidente de Tourvel, whom he first seduces, then destroys as a sacrifice to Mme de Merteuil's jealousy. The only human feeling that the pair possess is their affection for one another which survives their theories and their other *amours*. But they are both so determined to dominate, so impatient of any restraint, that Mme de Merteuil cannot make up her mind to return permanently to Valmont. They quarrel and she provokes a duel between Valmont and Danceny, in which Valmont is killed. The heaviest doom, however, is reserved for her. She not only loses all her possessions in a lawsuit and is exposed publicly for what she is, she is struck down by smallpox and, hideously disfigured, flies to Holland with such jewels as she has been able to lay hands on.

### III

The description in Letter x of an encounter between Mme de Merteuil and what she is pleased to term 'le chevalier régnant' is a good illustration of Laclos' interests and his method. The Marquise has been a little abrupt with the chevalier:

'Aussitôt, pour le dédommager, peut-être pour me dédommager moi-même, je me décide à lui faire connaître ma petite maison dont il ne se doutait pas . . . Arrivée dans ce temple de l'amour, je choisis le déshabillé le plus galant. Celui-ci est délicieux, il est de mon invention: il ne laisse rien voir, et pourtant fait tout deviner.'

'Après ces préparatifs, pendant que Victoire s'occupe des autres détails, je lis un chapitre du *Sopha*, une lettre d'*Héloïse* et deux contes de La Fontaine, pour recorder les différents tons que je voulais prendre.'

'Il [le chevalier] voit d'abord deux couverts mis; ensuite un lit fait. Nous passons jusqu'au boudoir, qui était dans toute sa parure.'

'L'heureux chevalier me releva, et mon pardon fut scellé sur cette même ottomane où vous et moi scellâmes si gaiement et de la même façon notre éternelle rupture.'

' . . . je modérai ses transports, et l'aimable coquetterie vint remplacer la tendresse. Je ne crois pas avoir jamais mis tant de soin à plaire, ni avoir été jamais aussi contente de moi. Après le souper, tour à tour enfant et raisonnable, folâtre et sensible, quelquefois même libertine, je me plaisais à le considérer comme un sultan au milieu de son sérail, dont j'étais tour à tour les

favorites différentes. En effet, ses hommages, réitérés, quoique toujours reçus par la même femme, le furent toujours par une maîtresse nouvelle.'

Baudelaire speaks disparagingly of 'la fouterie et la gloire de la fouterie', and at first one might pardonably suppose that the book is no more than a superior example of the *roman érotique*. The scene is certainly a phallic rite with *l'accouplement*, however elaborate and exciting, as its end and object. The 'temple de l'amour', the 'boudoir dans toute sa parure' and the uncomfortable *ottomane* are parts of the décor, the sultan in his seraglio is the last refinement of the rite. We might go on to conclude that Laclos does not make any contribution to the study of sexual relations, but simply describes in greater detail and with greater sophistication a *libertinage* which is as old as civilization.

There are, however, a number of things which distinguish this passage from the work of writers who are merely licentious. The first is the almost excessive elegance of the style—we remember the Goncourts' 'gentille ordure'—and the complete absence of the hot, stuffy erotic mist which usually envelops a performance of this sort. The next is the gaiety and wit, the comedy of 'cette même ottomane où vous et moi scellâmes si gaiement et de la même façon notre éternelle rupture' and of 'ses hommages réitérés, quoique toujours reçus par la même femme, le furent toujours par une maîtresse nouvelle.' Lastly, there is the supreme degree of sophistication revealed in the study of the 'authorities' and the preparation of 'les différents tons que je voulais prendre'.

This encounter is described objectively and needs to be completed by an earlier and more intimate passage from the same letter:

'Dites-moi donc, amant langoureux, ces femmes que vous avez eues, croyez-vous les avoir violées? Mais, quelque envie qu'on ait de se donner, quelque pressée que l'on en soit, encore faut-il un prétexte; et y en a-t-il de plus commode pour nous, que celui qui nous donne l'air de céder à la force. Pour moi, je l'avoue, une des choses qui me flattent le plus, est une attaque vive et bien faite, où tout se succède avec ordre, quoique avec rapidité; qui ne nous met jamais dans ce pénible embarras de réparer nous-mêmes une gaucherie dont au contraire nous aurions dû profiter; qui fait garder l'air de la violence jusque dans les choses que nous

accordons, et flatter nos deux passions favorites, la gloire de la défense et le plaisir de la défaite. Je conviens que ce talent, plus rare que l'on ne croit, m'a toujours fait plaisir, même alors qu'il ne m'a pas séduite, et que quelquefois il m'est arrivé de me rendre, uniquement comme récompense. Telle dans nos anciens tournois, la Beauté donnait le prix de la valeur et de l'adresse.'

The prose, as all good imaginative prose must be, is a pantomime which performs the actions it describes. The passage opens in a mood of gentle raillery and the 'amant langoureux' creates a slow, dreamy atmosphere. The reflection that however impatient a woman is to give in, there must be at least a show of force, gives the impression of desire stirring lazily beneath the polished surface and prepares the way for the changes in tempo. When we reach the 'Pour moi, je l'avoue . . .' the movement quickens, action succeeds action, terminating with *défaite*; but in spite of the sensuous pleasure, intellect remains in control. The whole scene is watched with the critical eye of a connoisseur who speaks approvingly of 'une attaque vive et bien faite, où tout se succède avec ordre, quoique avec rapidité.' It is a very superior game in which a *gaucherie* would cause *both* parties the same embarrassment as a double fault on the centre court at Wimbledon. The illusion of violence must be maintained in order to preserve the reputation of the players. The use of images borrowed from military strategy is an interesting characteristic of Laclos' style of which there will be more to say later on. Life is a miniature battle, a sham fight in which generals take up their positions, advance or retreat, with the same seriousness, the same skill as a general in the field. The military phrase links up with another, with the 'gloire de la défense et le plaisir de la défaite'. For this time the battle is a friendly one. Ostensibly the role of the female is to be 'defeated' by the predatory male and derives her *gloire* from a spirited 'defence' which in the nature of things is 'hopeless'.<sup>1</sup> In fact the engagement does not end in 'victory' for one party and 'defeat' for the other. It is a combination of

<sup>1</sup>Mme de Merteuil remarks of the Présidente: 'Saviez-vous que cette femme a plus de force que je ne croyais? Sa *défense* est bonne.'

'Tandis que nous nous occuperions à former cette petite fille pour l'intrigue nous n'en ferions qu'une femme facile. Or, je ne connais rien de si plat que cette facilité de bêtise, qui se rend sans savoir ni comment ni pourquoi, uniquement parce que l'on attaque et qu'elle ne sait pas résister. Ces sortes de femmes ne sont absolument que des *machines à plaisir*.'

the two, victory-and-defeat, which gives both the ambivalent feeling of *gloire-plaisir*.

A moment's reflection enables us to see that this book expresses a view of life which is very different from that of the previous century. Moral sanctions have been replaced by the new strategy or what Valmont and Mme de Merteuil call their 'principles'. Letter LXXXI, in which she gives some account of her moral education, deserves particular attention:

'Mais moi, qu'ai-je de commun avec ces femmes inconsidérées: quand m'avez-vous vue m'écarter des règles que je me suis prescrites et manquer à mes principes? Je dis mes principes, et je le dis à dessein: car ils ne sont pas, comme ceux des autres femmes, donnés au hasard, reçus et suivis par habitude; ils sont le fruit de mes profondes réflexions; je les ai créés, et je puis dire que je suis mon ouvrage.'

'Je n'avais pas quinze ans, je possédais déjà les talents auxquels la plus grande part de nos politiques doivent leur réputation; et je ne me trouvais encore qu'aux premiers éléments de la science que je voulais acquérir.'

'Ma tête seule fermentait; je ne désirais pas de jouir, je voulais savoir.'

'... j'arrivai vierge entre les bras de M. de Merteuil.—J'attendais avec sécurité le moment qui devait m'instruire, et j'eus besoin de réflexion pour montrer de l'embarras et de la crainte. Cette première nuit, dont on se fait pour l'ordinaire une idée si cruelle ou si douce, ne me présentait qu'une occasion d'expérience: douleur et plaisir, j'observai tout exactement, et je ne voyais dans ces diverses sensations que des faits à recueillir et à méditer.

'J'étudiai nos mœurs dans les romans; nos opinions dans les philosophes; je cherchai même dans les moralistes les plus sévères ce qu'ils exigeaient de nous, et je m'assurai ainsi de ce qu'on pouvait faire, de ce qu'on devait penser, et de ce qu'il fallait paraître.'

A few characteristic phrases leap to the eye: 'Je ne désirais pas de jouir, je voulais savoir,' 'la science que je voulais acquérir,' 'douleur et plaisir, j'observai tout exactement', 'le fruit de mes profondes réflexions', 'des faits . . . à méditer.' One of the greatest merits of this book is the absolute clairvoyance of the characters in examining their mental processes, in describing their conduct. They are not restrained by any inhibition, by any feeling of guilt or shame. They are completely untroubled by the modern

*angoisse* and Constant's preoccupation with his *malheureuse maladie morale* would have been incomprehensible to them. Nor is this all. When Mme de Merteuil declares: 'Je puis dire que je suis mon ouvrage', the boast certainly is no idle one. For the letter is a perfect illustration of the *constructive* analysis of the eighteenth century in which, as I have already said, the writer only takes his mind to pieces in order to fit himself for living. It explains, too, why, when compared with the great novels of the next century, the *Liaisons* leave us with the impression of sanity and poise, recalling forcibly Gide's dictum: 'Le classicisme, c'est la modestie'.

A similar revolution has taken place in the emotional life. 'Car enfin', writes Valmont, 'car enfin si j'ai eu quelquefois, auprès de cette femme étonnante, des moments de faiblesse qui ressemblent à cette passion pusillanime, j'ai toujours su les vaincre et revenir à mes principes.'

Love is usually regarded as an emotional experience in which sexual passion is one of the factors. Now the thought that they can for a single moment be at the mercy of their emotions, or of what Valmont acrimoniously calls 'cette passion pusillanime', is intolerable both to him and to Mme de Merteuil. Their aim is to eliminate the emotional factor altogether. Love comes to mean the intellectual satisfaction they get from the pursuit and defeat of the 'enemy' and the sensual pleasure which accompanies it.

The consequences of these changes are far reaching. The drama of the seventeenth century is the conflict between sexual passion and duty, whether the characters emerge strengthened and unified as they do in Corneille or are hurried down the dizzy slope to destruction as they are in Racine. The drama of the nineteenth century is the conflict between love and worldly success, of the young man who ruins his career for women and its two most characteristic symbols are Adolphe and Frédéric Moreau.<sup>1</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Adolphe* where one of Adolphe's advisors writes to him: 'Toutes les routes vous sont ouvertes . . . mais souvenez-vous bien qu'il y a entre vous et tous les genres de succès un obstacle insurmontable, et que cet obstacle est Ellénore'.

These words might serve as an epigraph not only for Constant's age, but for the whole of the nineteenth century. For the alleged conflict between love and worldly success is the foundation on which a vast structure of false values was erected which ruined the lives of many unfortunate people.



both cases the conflict is an *interior* one. It is this which makes or mars the characters. The eighteenth century presents a different picture. There is no interior conflict in the minds of Laclos' two principal characters because the elements of conflict—love as well as duty—have been removed. The real conflict is an *exterior* one—the conflict between individual men and women and ultimately, as we shall see, between Man and Woman. Their attitude is thrown into high and startling relief by the conflict in the mind of the Présidente. For it is because she stands for traditional principles and beliefs that she is hopelessly outmanœuvred by the 'new strategy' and is destroyed by a conflict which is identical with those of the characters of Mme de La Fayette.

It has been urged in criticism of the novel that the characters devote their immense gifts to frivolous ends, to seducing and being seduced. This criticism needs to be examined by detailed reference to the text and particularly to Laclos' use of the word *gloire* and to his military images:

'Séduite par votre réputation, il me semblait que vous manquez à ma *gloire*; je brûlais de vous combattre corps à corps. C'est le seul de mes goûts qui ait jamais pris un moment d'empire sur moi.'

(Merteuil to Valmont, Letter xxxi)

'Dépositaire de tous les secrets de mon cœur, je vais vous confier le plus grand projet que j'aie jamais formé [the seduction of the Présidente] . . . son succès m'assure autant de *gloire* que de *plaisir*. L'amour qui prépare ma couronne hésite lui-même entre le myrte et le laurier, ou plutôt il les réunira pour honorer mon triomphe'.

(Valmont to Merteuil, Letter iv)

The word *gloire* echoes and re-echoes throughout the literature of the seventeenth century. It is a word which more than any other the great writers of the time had made their own and on which they had set their personal stamp. It described the reputation and triumphs of the seventeenth-century heroes, but their triumphs were real ones and the esteem they enjoyed worth having. It described, too, the successes of the Cornelian hero on the battle-field as well as his triumphs in the moral sphere, and it signified the peculiar *éclat* of the Duc de Nemours in the *Princesse de Clèves*. It has a strange resonance, a glamour—I use

the word in a favourable sense—for which we shall look in vain in the *Liaisons dangereuses*. With the passing of the century the scene changes too. The court is replaced by the salon, the battlefield by the boudoir. When Laclos' characters speak of their *gloire*, they mean success in the chase followed by a good performance on the *ottomane*. It is impossible to escape the impression that civilization has suffered a drastic impoverishment, that the novelist instead of consolidating and extending the conquests of his predecessors, has abandoned a good deal of the territory which they had won, that there has in short been a narrowing of the whole field of artistic experience.

In a sense this is true, but we must make some further distinctions. The criticism applies with most force to Laclos' *characters*, and we shall have to show that in choosing the approach he did, he has still been able to make a valuable criticism of man and society. He does not, however, altogether escape the implications. The limitations of the age that he was criticizing are reflected in his work. The style of the seventeenth-century writers would in the main have been useless for his purpose; but compared with theirs, his instrument, for all its grace and elegance, has comparatively few notes and these notes are singularly lacking in richness. The words have no overtones and no resonance; they say exactly what they mean and no more. They are admirably adapted for distinguishing between one sensation and another—

'Tel est le charme de la confiante amitié [says Mme de Merteuil], c'est elle qui fait que vous êtes toujours ce que j'aime le mieux; mais, en vérité, le chevalier est ce qui me *plaît* davantage.'<sup>1</sup>—but as soon as the novelist tries to express emotions, the instrument fails him. When Valmont becomes serious over his pursuit of the Présidente, he also becomes crude and verbose; and even in the letters of the Présidente and Mme de Rosemonde—essential as they are to the pattern of the book—one feels that the stereotyped concepts are not adequate to the weight of the emotions they are intended to convey.

Laclos is indeed the chronicler of the decline of the civilization which the seventeenth-century writers had celebrated and his triumphs are of a different nature. French writers are fond of using words like *flétrir* and *dessécher* to describe the general impression made by the book, but we must go further than this. It is,

<sup>1</sup>Italics in this and all other quotations mine. M.T.

paradoxically, one of the qualities of Laclos' style that it literally blights and withers the feelings that it presents, that human nature is made interesting by virtue of its degradation:

'Si une fois vous *formez* cette fille [writes Mme de Merteuil], il y aura bien du malheur si le Gercourt ne devient pas, comme un autre, la fable de Paris.'

'Comme je n'ai pas de vanité, je ne m'arrête pas aux détails de la nuit: mais vous me connaissez, et j'ai été content de moi.'

When Valmont suggests that they should renew their *liaison*, Mme de Merteuil replies:

'Je ne crois pas que mon chevalier eût autant d'indulgence que moi; il serait homme à ne pas approuver *notre renouvellement de bail*.'

It is a triumph of Laclos' art that when he uses simple words like *formez* or *renouvellement de bail* he can make us feel the sentiment wither beneath his touch.

Besides the isolated word, Laclos is master of a savage farce which is peculiarly his own. The best example occurs in Letters XLVII and XLVIII. In the second of these letters, which is written by Valmont to the Présidente and begins: 'C'est après une nuit orageuse, et pendant laquelle je n'ai pas fermé l'œil', he goes on:

'Jamais je n'eus tant de plaisir en vous écrivant; jamais je ne ressentis, dans cette occupation, une émotion si douce, et cependant si vive. Tout semble augmenter mes transports: l'air que je respire est plein de volupté; la table même sur laquelle je vous écris, consacrée pour la première fois à cet usage, devient pour moi l'autel sacré de l'amour; combien elle va s'embellir à mes yeux! j'aurai tracé sur elle le serment de vous aimer toujours! Pardonnez, je vous en supplie, au désordre de mes sens. Je devrais peut-être m'abandonner moins à des transports que vous ne partagez pas: il faut vous quitter un moment pour dissiper une ivresse qui s'augmente à chaque instant, et qui devient plus forte que moi.'

The 'table' is the fetich in this passage and when we turn back to the previous letter to Mme de Merteuil we appreciate its significance. The scene is the *ottomane* of an old flame of Valmont's:

'Cette complaisance de ma part est le prix de celle qu'elle vient d'avoir, de me servir de pupitre pour écrire à ma belle dévote, à qui j'ai trouvé plaisant d'envoyer une lettre écrite du lit et presque d'entre les bras d'une fille, interrompue même pour une infidélité complète, et dans laquelle je lui rends un compte exact de ma

situation et de ma conduite. Emilie, qui a lu l'épître, en a ri comme une folle, et j'espère que vous en rirez aussi.'

Compare these passages with almost any page from the *Princesse de Clèves* and you see where Laclos is leading us. The heroic age, with its spaciousness, its chivalry, its sense of the dignity of man, is a thing of the past. Continenence did not always stand very high among its virtues, but there is a world of difference between what it called *l'amour* and what the eighteenth century called *la volupté*. A warmth and generosity have gone out of life, for there is nothing *généreux* about Laclos' characters. He paid a heavy price for that sanity and poise which we cannot deny him. His mind was primarily a critical one and his characters are intellectual creations. Their emotional poverty contrasts strangely with their complicated manœuvres. Mme de La Fayette's courtiers and the cloistered Adolphe drawing up a merciless indictment of his own weaknesses are far richer and more complex than the exponents of the 'new strategy', hurrying from the salon to the boudoir, from the boudoir to the 'petite maison' and back again; glancing up, from a preliminary encounter with an intended victim, at their reflection in one of the bright mirrors on the walls to ensure that their smile is right or that they are displaying the proper degree of gravity; trying hard to control that strident note which sometimes threatens to disturb the soft caressing tone which was so important a part of their 'technique'. Mme de La Fayette and Constant derived, from their contemplation of the human situation, a certain general wisdom which gives their books another dimension that we shall not find in Laclos'. Constant's wisdom in particular crystallizes in a series of maxims which are not unworthy of the greatest French moralists; but Laclos can offer us no more than a few pithy axioms which might have come from a military training manual.

#### IV

I think that it will be apparent that there are two kinds of *liaison* in this novel. The aim of the first, that between Mme de Merteuil and Belleruche, Valmont and Emilie, is simply sensual pleasure. The aim of the second, that between Valmont and the Présidente, Valmont and Cécile, is the destruction and downfall of the victim. This is how Valmont speaks of his affair with the Présidente:

'Mon projet, au contraire, est qu'elle sente bien la valeur et l'étendue de chacun des sacrifices qu'elle me fera; de ne pas la conduire si vite, que le remords ne puisse la suivre; *de faire expirer sa vertu dans une lente agonie*; de la fixer sans cesse sur ce désolant spectacle; et de ne lui accorder le bonheur de m'avoir dans ses bras, qu'après l'avoir forcée à n'en plus dissimuler le désir.'

'J'aurai cette femme; je l'enlèverai au mari qui la profane; *j'oserai la ravir au Dieu même qu'elle adore*. . . . Loin de moi l'idée de détruire les préjugés qui l'assiègent. Ils ajouteront à mon bonheur et à ma gloire.'

Nothing could be more misleading than to describe Laclos' characters as sadists, to pretend that they have anything to do with the childish 'satanism' of the next century or to introduce confusing concepts like *le mal*.<sup>1</sup> Valmont and Mme de Merteuil are completely amoral and their unbelief is absolute. Whatever Laclos' own opinion of their conduct, his novel is essentially a *psychological* and not an *ethical* drama, and it represents a new phase in the French novel. The *Princesse de Clèves* is, among other things, a criticism of the *morale laïque*, of the inadequacy of moral concepts once traditional sanctions have been removed. The *Liaisons dangereuses* are a clear demonstration of the logical outcome of the 'new morality'. Laclos' characters have got rid of its concepts and are free to devote themselves to their particular ends without any interference from conscience. Their aims are something very different from the suffering of their rather feeble victims and they become clear when we turn to the military imagery. This is Valmont's description of the fall of the Présidente:

'Jusque-là, ma belle amie, vous me trouverez, je crois, une pureté de méthode qui vous fera plaisir; et vous verrez que je ne me suis écarté en rien des vrais principes de *cette guerre*, que nous avons remarquée souvent être *si semblable à l'autre*. *Jugez-moi donc comme Turenne ou Frédéric*. J'ai forcé à combattre l'ennemi qui ne voulait que temporiser; je me suis donné, par de savantes manœuvres, le choix du terrain et celui des dispositions. . . .'

One feels tempted at first to dismiss the claim to be judged 'like Turenne or Frederick' as an absurdity, as the fantasy of an excited seducer; but this explanation will not do. The concept of

<sup>1</sup>André Gide is, surprisingly, one of the worst offenders. See his Preface to the English translation (*Dangerous Acquaintances*, London, 1940). 'There is no doubt as to his (Valmont) being hand in glove with Satan' (p. viii).

'war' is an integral part of Laclos' view of life and the military imagery an organic part of his style. He is the chronicler not merely of the decline of civilization, but of a deliberate and successful attack on traditional values in which the intellect becomes purely destructive. Baudelaire has pointed out that the Présidente is the only character 'appartenant à la bourgeoisie' and adds that this observation is an important one. She is indeed a symbol of the solid middle class which had always been the moral backbone of France and for this reason she is the focus of the main attack. At the same time, it is difficult to follow Baudelaire when he goes on to describe her as an 'admirable création'. While there are no grounds for supposing that Laclos approved of the machinations of his characters, it is undeniably a weakness that the Présidente is faintly drawn and that her letters, for all their dignity and virtuous sentiments, do not contain a single memorable phrase.

What is behind this attack on tradition, this unending pursuit of male and female, is a desire to dominate, a lust for power which can only be satisfied by the submission and surrender of the 'enemy' and which creates, in the minds of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, the sensation or rather the illusion of *gloire*. Although there is nothing in the *Liaisons* which can be described as *angoisse* or *inquiétude*, the continual references to strategy and politics do betray a sense of frustration which may well reflect the personal frustration of the novelist and possibly the exasperation which led him to write the *Liaisons* and the essay on Vauban. It is because the characters have been unable to find a proper outlet for their talents that they devote them to such unworthy ends. Their 'wars' are substitutes for the real war—'cette guerre . . . si semblable à l'autre' is a striking admission—in which they would be only too happy to engage or for the large-scale dictatorship which would have given them empire over a whole people.<sup>1</sup>

What may be called the conscious conflict between individual men and women is also a reflection of a deeper conflict, the conflict between Man and Woman, the sex-war represented in its most ruthless form by Valmont and Mme de Merteuil. The famous Letter LXXXI contains an explicit statement of Mme de Merteuil's aims:

<sup>1</sup>It is because a solution is impossible in modern society that the form of seduction practised by Valmont became, in Baudelaire's words, the 'source de la sensualité mystique et des sottises amoureuses du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.'



‘Née pour venger mon sexe et maîtriser le vôtre, j’avais su me créer des moyens inconnus jusqu’à moi.’

Again:

‘Dans cette partie si inégale, notre fortune est de ne pas perdre, et votre malheur est de ne pas gagner. Quand je vous accorderais autant de talents qu’à nous, de combien encore ne devrions-nous pas vous surpasser, par la nécessité où nous sommes d’en faire un continuel usage!’

One detects in the second passage a feeling of dull resentment that men and women are usually so unequally equipped, that Mme de Merteuil herself belongs to the ‘weaker sex’.

The jealousy that they feel over one another’s ‘conquests’ is not merely a personal jealousy; it is rather a *dépit* caused by the success of the other sex and a limitation of their own ambition to dominate:

‘Tenez, ma belle amie [writes Valmont] tant que vous vous partagez entre plusieurs, je n’ai pas la moindre jalousie: je ne vois alors que *les successeurs d’Alexandre, incapables de conserver entre eux tous cet empire où je régnaïs seul.*’

The reference to Alexander’s empire is another curious fantasy where military and political ambitions once more come into play.

They are both equally determined to conquer: ‘Conquérir est notre destin’, cries Valmont. ‘Il faut vaincre ou périr’, retorts Mme de Merteuil. They are, unfortunately for Valmont, very unevenly matched. Baudelaire speaks of ‘un reste de sensibilité par quoi il est inférieur à la Merteuil, chez qui tout ce qui est humain est calciné’. What makes Mme de Merteuil an outstanding creation is first her magnificent intelligence, and secondly her complete implacability and single-mindedness. Her boast that already at fifteen she possessed ‘the talents to which the greatest part of our politicians owe their reputations’ and that this was only the beginning, is the measure of her powers and of her tragedy. Her ruthlessness is apparent not only in what she does, but in her slighting references to the performances of others, to ‘ces [femmes] imprudentes, qui dans leur amant actuel ne savent pas voir leur ennemi futur.’ Valmont’s ‘reste de sensibilité’ makes him extremely vulnerable for Mme de Merteuil, and his uncertainty of himself slips out in his exaggerated tone, in the angry reference to ‘cette passion pusillanime’, in:

‘Que nous sommes heureux que les femmes se défendent si mal! nous ne serions auprès d’elles que de timides esclaves.’

It is not for nothing that Mme de Merteuil treats him as an *écolier*—the phrase is lifted from one of his own letters—as a blunderer in a field where she is an expert. A good deal of her criticism is caused by a jealousy which cannot admit that the other sex has any ability at all, but Valmont does not escape the irony of his creator. The fall of the Présidente is comedy of a different kind from the account of the letter written in Emilie’s bed. After a prolonged siege, the hero, who claims that his triumphs should be measured by those of Turenne and Frederick, only succeeds in seducing the woman when she has fainted from fright!

‘As I have repeatedly told you,’ writes Mme de Merteuil in another letter:

‘Vous n’en avez pas moins de l’amour pour votre Présidente; non pas, à la vérité, de l’amour bien pur ni bien tendre, mais celui que vous pouvez avoir.’

This analysis of Valmont’s capacity for love is a striking illustration of Mme de Merteuil’s understanding of other people and of her immense intellectual superiority over him. Although Valmont has a clear understanding of certain aspects of his own character, he is very limited and very often the dupe of his own feelings. His much vaunted ‘principles’ imply a serious limitation. He has none of the insight into other people’s characters which distinguishes Mme de Merteuil. He can ‘lay’ the *femmes volages* of the day like any one going, but as soon as he is faced with a woman, however ordinary, who is outside his experience he becomes the bungling amateur. Mme de Merteuil realizes, with genuine astonishment, that even after the dispatch of the diabolical letter which she composed for him to send to the Présidente, he is still thinking subconsciously of going back to her:

‘Quoi! vous avez l’idée de renouer, et vous avez pu écrire ma lettre! Vous m’avez donc cru bien gauche à mon tour! Ah! croyez-moi, Vicomte, quand une femme frappe dans le cœur d’une autre, elle manque rarement de trouver l’endroit sensible, et la blessure est incurable.’

She makes it clear, too, in the same letter that her victory over the Présidente is primarily a victory over Valmont:

‘Vous allez trouver peut-être que j’évalue bien haut cette femme, que naguère j’appréciais si peu; point du tout; mais c’est que ce

n'est pas sur elle que j'ai remporté cet avantage; c'est sur vous: voilà qui est vraiment délicieux.'

When Valmont proposes that they should settle down together permanently, she replies:

'J'ai pu avoir quelquefois, la prétention de remplacer à moi seule tout un sérail; mais il ne m'a jamais convenu d'en faire partie. Je croyais que vous saviez cela. . . . Oui, moi, je sacrifierais un goût, et pour m'en occuper comment? en attendant à mon tour, et en esclave soumise, les sublimes faveurs de votre *Hautesse*.'

'J'ai accusé les individus,' wrote Benjamin Constant of women, in a memorable phrase in his diary, 'j'aurais dû m'en prendre à l'espèce.' The struggle between Valmont and Mme de Merteuil is the centuries' old antagonism between the sexes, the primitive impulse to dominate which is apparent in the co-existence of love and hate to which many writers have drawn attention. They both desire to rule in their own kingdoms and a serious preference for another member of their own sex is felt to be a threat to their position. But that Valmont can for a moment resist her demands or that she can refuse to accept his ultimatum to become in fact a member of his seraglio, is felt by both to be not merely a personal affront, but an affront to the whole sex.

Mme de Merteuil describes herself in one letter as a 'nouvelle Dalila' and goes on to explain the significance of the 'myth'. For the man each conquest is a victory for his sex; for the woman it is equally a victory for hers, because in allowing herself to be seduced, she dominates the male, depriving him of his strength—his strength to harm her sex—by transforming him into her 'slave'. It is not without significance that Mme de Merteuil displays homo-sexual leaning for the 'petite Volanges'.<sup>1</sup> For the sex-war—the desire to dominate and the fear of domination—is in part the psychological explanation of homo-sexuality and the dislike of homo-sexuals for the opposite sex.

The emergence of the dark forces which I have described gives the novel its immense vitality. Sexual pleasure, however refined, is an insufficient motive of action for people who are so monstrously 'enlightened', so *avertis*, so completely without illusions

<sup>1</sup> 'Cependant si j'avais moins de mœurs, je crois qu'il ["le chevalier régnant"] aurait dans ce moment un rival dangereux; c'est la petite Volanges. Je raffole de cette enfant: c'est une vraie passion . . .'

about themselves and the value of their pleasures. 'L'amour,' remarks Mme de Merteuil, 'que l'on nous vante comme la cause de nos plaisirs, n'en est au plus que le prétexte.' Sexual intrigue is only a means to an end and this end is evident when Mme de Merteuil explains that she always wrests their personal 'secret' from her lovers. It is, she says, a safeguard which prevents betrayal and enables her to make the world believe that she is *un modèle de vertu*; but is not the real attraction that it gives her the power of life and death over another human being and a member of the other sex?

The 'moral ending' has been a source of some perplexity to readers of the *Liaisons dangereuses*. It is not, as it is usually assumed to be, purely a sop to the public which enabled the writer to maintain that he had written a work of edification for *jeunes filles* on the threshold of marriage. It is really the final episode in the sex-war. For in making the Female infinitely more brilliant and accomplished than the Male, the novelist created a dilemma for himself which could only be solved by his personal intervention in the world of his creatures. Valmont's death—the death of the Male—is deliberately invested with a certain glamour which atones for any lapses and perhaps for his inferiority to Mme de Merteuil. But it remains a victory for the other sex which must be expiated. The novelist's personal jealousy is aroused and he revenges himself on his greatest creation by covering her with shame and ignominy. She is deprived of wealth, reputation and looks—of all the things which enabled her to use her great intellectual powers to the detriment of Laclos' own sex—and she flies to Holland, a fugitive from *male* justice.<sup>1</sup>

## V

What is to be our final estimate? We know Baudelaire's answer: 'Livre de moraliste aussi haut que les plus élevés, aussi

<sup>1</sup>There are interesting ramifications. Mme de Volanges, for example, is a symbolical figure who represents the Virtuous Matron. It is she who warns the Présidente of Valmont's danger to the Sex, she who is among the first to console Mme de Merteuil after Prévau's supposed *tentative* against the Sex, she who is most assiduous in exposing Mme de Merteuil as the black sheep who has disgraced the Sex. She is an ironical figure who inevitably plays the Male game in leading the anti-Merteuil party. This applies in greater or lesser degree to all who take part in the 'battles.'

profond que les plus profonds. . . . Livre essentiellement français.' 'Un traité d'anatomie morale', replies Suarès.<sup>1</sup> 'Les romans des autres peuples sont puérils près de celui-là.' 'Ce fut l'apparition,' answers a less friendly critic,<sup>2</sup> 'la dernière apparition, apparition attardée, composée, froide, mais indéniable, de celui qui ne mélange pas, qui ne begaye pas, qui ne transige et ne cille pas; de Racine. . . . Une grande voix parle par ce petit auteur.'

We may not find Laclos' novel particularly enjoyable or particularly edifying, but that it is a masterpiece we cannot doubt. The appearance of a masterpiece and the artist's choice of his medium are not fortuitious; they depend on a number of different circumstances. The *Liaisons dangereuses* belong to the great French tradition and they reveal the influence of the masters of the seventeenth century on every page, indeed almost in every line. Tradition is never static; it is constantly developing and though the basic human emotions remain the same, feelings are perpetually shifting, changing. The accent never falls exactly in the same place in different ages. The Man of Honour and the Man of Passion had had their day and disappeared from the scene. Laclos' theme is the tragedy of the Rational Man, the man who was carefully conditioned through the removal of all moral scruples and the sense of guilt, but inevitably condemned to action in a very limited field. The novel is a masterpiece because it gives final expression to this phase of human experience.

It was because the grand manner was no longer a suitable vehicle for experience that the outstanding work of fiction of the eighteenth century was a novel in prose, and it reflects the novelist's experience as surely as the great *tirades* of the previous century. The encounters between Racine's characters take place in public. Their savage denunciation reverberates through vast apartments in lofty palaces, rises above the women's chatter in the seraglio of the 'Grand Seigneur' and drowns the childish singing in the Temple. The characteristic note of the eighteenth century is not publicity, is not the intimacy of the nineteenth century; it is *complicity*. It is the whispered confidence, the muttered confession of the letter-writer; the undertone which insinuates itself into your consciousness like a finger probing a secret wound. The murmur which arises from all these people bent industriously over their writing-tables is not less dramatic or

<sup>1</sup>Xénies, Paris, 1923, p. 113. <sup>2</sup>Giraudoux, *op. cit.* pp. 64-5.

less varied than the stormy entrances and exits of Racine's characters and it is far more subversive. They all have their place in the pattern and each voice blends into the whole—the carefully modulated voices of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, the anguished voice of the Présidente, the faltering voices of the young lovers, the chorus provided by Mme de Rosemonde and Mme de Volanges, the voices of servants and retainers.

More than any other great novel this is a book for grown-ups, and the theme is treated with a clarity and integrity which have made the French novel supreme in Europe. It is, indeed, a 'livre essentiellement français' which makes not only its English counterpart, *Clarissa Harlowe*, but also the much praised *Manon Lescaut* appear crude and immature by comparison. It is at once a portrait of an age whose tragedy lies in the waste of its great gifts, in a nihilism which drove it to expend its powers in defacing human nature, and a profound analysis of a perennial human situation. It matters little whether the writer was or was not a 'petit auteur': the 'grande voix' is unmistakable.

## CAMILLE GOEMANS

# PAUL DELVAUX

THE painter Paul Delvaux is not unknown in England: the foremost of those who first introduced him into this country are E. L. T. Mesens, who belonged from its inception to the group of Delvaux' supporters in Belgium, and Roland Penrose, who still owns some of the most curious and most beautiful of his pre-war paintings.

One of the things which most surprised me was to see, a few days after the liberation of Belgium, at the Galerie Lou Cosyn in Brussels (where, despite the danger incurred by showing paintings of this type, Delvaux and Magritte held a permanent exhibition until the end of the German occupation), several British soldiers entering one after the other, and demanding to be shown the paintings of Paul Delvaux. They remembered those which had impressed them in London before the war, and were extremely curious to know what had become of Delvaux and



his work. One of them even unhesitatingly acquired one of those enormous canvases which Delvaux was wont to paint during the war, and whose dimensions are the despair of collectors, because of the difficulty of placing them.

Thus, the war has not put an end to Paul Delvaux' work. He continued to paint, though it is true that he refused systematically to organize any exhibition of his paintings. It is significant that when an exhibition of his water-colours was arranged at the Brussels gallery mentioned above, it was entitled 'Exposition d'œuvres de Paul Delvaux', and not 'Exposition Paul Delvaux', as would have been the case had he given it his patronage. In addition, not one of the water-colours shown was any longer his property.

Last December, the Brussels *Palais des Beaux Arts* organized the first official exhibition of Delvaux' paintings to take place for five or six years. This exhibition may be described as 'colossal', both because of the considerable number of the works displayed, and because of the dimensions of many of them. Before 1940, Delvaux already had a tendency towards large-scale vision: during the war, he delighted still more in the execution of paintings of unusual proportions, and there is one, *La ville inquiète*, in which, it is said, no less than 1,200 figures may be counted. The figure most in evidence, in the foreground of the immense canvas, is, at any rate, larger than life-size. However, for some time now Delvaux has tended to revert to more normal dimensions. This does not mean that he has renounced giving free scope to his obsession for wide, bare spaces which his cautious brush covers with figures and colour. One of the peculiarities of the exhibition was that there were only a few odd canvases for sale: all the rest belonged to collectors, mostly friends of Delvaux. Each one of them is on the look-out for Delvaux' new paintings, and contends for them while they are as yet only sketched out in the studio.

Paul Delvaux' exhibition in Brussels evoked varying reactions, and, on the first occasion for many years in the history of painting, quite violent reactions. For a moment, one could imagine oneself back in the great revolutionary epochs. It was an event. Seldom has a collection of pictures by a living painter made such a great impression. Also, it was an exhibition to which, apart from painters and lovers of art, an immense public was attracted by

curiosity. Discussions arose in artistic circles. They have not died down yet; but when all is said and done, it is difficult to consider them on the level of discussions of principles and schools of painting. They end by revolving round the personality and the personal conception of Paul Delvaux. For Delvaux does not claim to represent anything, he does not claim to belong to any school, and, if he has preferences, he neither adopts nor pretends to adopt any doctrinal point of view. His painting is his own personal adventure. He denies incorporation in any group. From this it must inevitably be concluded that he does not associate himself with certain common experiences to which a certain number of painters and writers have attached themselves. Delvaux remains independent. He wishes to preserve his liberty, and if he has participated in certain manifestations—and perhaps he will participate in them again—it appears that each time he commits himself for the moment only, and that he reserves the right of taking up in the future the attitude which will best suit him. The kind of fundamental solidarity which characterized surrealism, for example, is foreign to him. Thus, the discussions raised by his latest exhibition end, through lack of material for argument, by falling into space. They are summarized by the question whether, from the banal point of view, Delvaux deserves the success he has achieved, and whether he is a *painter* or not. It can be seen at once that the question is badly put. Besides, it implies forgetfulness of the fact that the artist is a man from whom we expect a message, a communication of a certain kind, and not the more or less tolerable decoration of the walls between which we spend our existence. From the moment when the light which emanates from a work of art becomes visible to us, the attendant detail becomes necessary, and is at once legitimized. The painting of Paul Delvaux rises above the level of pictorial miracles proper, miracles to which it is impossible to remain insensitive, but which are, apart from that which can be drawn from them by the gifted spectator who does not hesitate to betray their origin, only proofs of the skill and fortune of their authors. It is characteristic that in Belgium the general tendency of painters and critics should be to oppose, bitterly sometimes, everything in a painter which tends to dominate his painting, and to defend passionately a blind slavery to suggestions of colour and to brushwork. They can hardly forgive Delvaux for

being motivated by an inner vision and for subjecting his work to it—sometimes with great humility. René Magritte has been driven against a similar kind of opposition.

A great many analogies are being found between Delvaux and Magritte. They are often mentioned together. They have figured together in many exhibitions. Both have participated in surrealist manifestations. They are both Belgians. And it is true that, at a certain time, perhaps at a decisive time, Magritte exercised some influence over Delvaux. It seems obvious to us today, now that the years have passed, that Magritte's painting has been of great assistance to Delvaux in determining his path, which he began to follow relatively late. It was only in 1936 that we saw the first pictures which sprang from the inspiration which dominates Delvaux' present painting. Many of his early paintings in the genre which we see today could have appeared as variations on an idea of Magritte. A suddenly neutral treatment of colour did nothing to dispel this impression. Since then, Delvaux has completely disengaged his personality. He has even abandoned those slightly mechanical surprise effects in which Magritte has always excelled—effects which Delvaux evolved to a perfection whose charm is still potent, and emanates, for instance, from a brilliant rose growing, by enchantment, from the hard boards of a parquet floor. Particularly since Magritte changed his style—for during the war he suddenly expanded the field of his experience—only a very distant affinity now exists between Delvaux and Magritte, unless we go back to Chirico, who seems to be the painter to whom they can both be traced in a final analysis, the magician Chirico of the poetic years. From a journey made some time ago to Italy, Delvaux brought back an enthusiasm for antique architecture and for the contrast between the latter and modern construction, and a realization of the effects which might be produced by synthesizing them with the modest dwelling-places of his native land. But this is only the setting in which he places the evolution of his characters, the atmosphere with which he permeates them, and which emphasizes the hallucinating quality of their grouping. These incorporations and contrasts have not, therefore, as in Chirico's work, a life of their own, deprived of all external significance. One feels that the emphasis of Delvaux' work falls on the comedy played by the characters whom he presents in these extraordinary settings.

I use the word 'comedy' intentionally. Paul Delvaux used it himself when he entitled one of his pictures *Les personnages de comédie*. As time goes on, the astonishing coherence in the succession of Delvaux' pictures becomes more evident. In fact, the truth is that he is the inventor of a drama, of a peculiar humanity, with its own system of relations. He himself often appears in his paintings, and this seems to me significant. Yet another indication is the introduction into some of his pictures of a naturalist, who seems to be taken from the illustrations of Jules Verne's books, and whose nature and occupations Delvaux obviously does not wish to seem ambiguous. From this it may be deduced that Delvaux has some idea of self-effacement in the results of his mysterious explorations which he yields to us: explorations of a world in which he participates, in which, perhaps, he lives even more than in this, and which he is only striving to reconstruct with the utmost faithfulness compatible with objectivity; and if this world is not that of anguish and solitude, it is at any rate very close to it. Yet there is in Delvaux' paintings a kind of inner tremor, a curiously stimulating charm, so much grace and warmth in the women's bodies, that he seems to portray the flowers rather than the abysses of despair.

[Translated by NATALIA GALITZINE]

## WAR AND PEACE—II

### I—BUILDING ALIVE

WILLIAM SANSOM

As on a fleet and smooth naval pinnacle, intricate with grey cocks and rope and white-painted enumeration—we six on the Heavy Fire Unit drove swiftly through the quiet Sunday streets. Sometimes at odd corners or through a breach in the skyline of tall buildings the huge buff plume showed itself, calm and clean as sand against a pale bluish sky. We as well felt clean, in our blue flaired tunics and silver buttons, too clean for what was coming, conscious of this and awkward at a time when smudged khaki

and camouflage net are the equipment of action. The streets were too clean; there were no people, the people were all hidden away cooking their Sunday dinners; one church bell pealed ceaselessly to an empty town caught in the Sunday pause.

Then, gradually, the immaculate polish showed a ruffling, stray scraps of paper suggested the passing of a crowd, a weed of splintered glass sprung up here and there on the pavements, another and invisible weed seemed to be thrusting the window frames from their sockets and ahead, as this tangle grew denser, the street hung fogged with yellow dust.

Our destination lay within the dust. Once inside it was easy to see, only the outer air had painted it opaque. But it was like driving from the streets of a town into sudden country; nothing metropolitan remained to these torn pavements, to the earthen mortar dust and the shattered brick returning to the clay. The fly-bomb had blasted a pause within the pause of Sunday morning.

Ambulances already. Two or three people stood about, handkerchiefs to their red-splashed faces. In the silence a loud-speaker called for silence. The rich living voice appealed to the dead rubble, coaxing it to make tapping noises. And men with long detecting poles weaved to and fro through the mist like slow shrimpers. We were ordered round the débris to search the broken buildings on either side.

At the top of the first flight of stairs, dark and rickety, a light shone through a crack in the unhinged door. The door came off easily. A single shadeless electric bulb hung over a tailor's table, shone weakly and yellow against the large daylit window beyond. On the table lay a pair of trousers, an iron, slivers of glass and splashes of red blood, comet-shaped, like flickings from a pen. Every lightly fixed furnishing of the room had shifted—bales of cloth, doors, chairs, plaster mouldings, a tall cupboard—all these had moved closer and now leant huddled at strange, intimate angles. Plaster dust covered everything. There was no space left in the room, there was nobody in the room. The blood led in wide round drops to the door, the tailor must have been 'walking wounded'. Had he been one of those outside, fingering blindly for the ambulance doors? The yellow bulb on its single string burned on, the only life in this lonely Sunday workroom, the only relic of the tailor's shattered patience.

Then, under the steady burning of this bulb, against its silent continuing effort, other sounds began to whisper. My number two, Barnes, looked at me quickly—the building was alive. Our boots had thudded on the stairs. Now for a moment, no more, they were quiet. They were silent, the light was silent, but falsely—for beneath these obvious silences other sounds, faint, intractable, began to be heard. Creakings, a groan of wood, a light spatter of moving plaster, from somewhere the trickle of water from a broken pipe. The whole house rustled. A legion of invisible platermice seemed to be pattering up and down the walls. Little, light sounds, but massing a portentous strength. The house, suddenly stretched by blast, was settling itself. It might settle down on to new and firm purchases, it might be racking itself further, slowly, slowly grinding apart before a sudden collapse. I saw Barnes glance at the ceiling; he was thinking of the four floors still hanging above us; he was thinking perhaps, as I was, that the raid was still on and that any other explosion within miles might rock through the earth and shake the whole lot down. Walking in such houses, the walls and floors are forgotten; the mind pictures only the vivid inner framework of beams and supports, where they might run and how, under stress, they might behave; the house is perceived as a skeleton.

Then through the stripped window came further sounds—a distant explosion from the south, and above this the purposeful drone of a second bomb flying louder every moment. The gallows that would mark its course! To each dreadful roof gallows along the bomb's course a black sock would rise to swing like a sentence rather than a warning of death. The sound approached like a straight line. It approached thus for many people . . . everyone on the half-circle of its sound fanning forwards would attach the bomb to themselves. It could drop anywhere. It was absolutely reasonless. It was the first purely fatal agent that had come to man for centuries, bringing people to cross their fingers again, bringing a rebirth of superstition.

Down in the courtyard they were carrying a man out from the opposite block. We caught a glance of him through the twisted framework of an iron footbridge. They had laid him on a blanketed stretcher on the grey rubble. He lay still, bloodless, only his face showing, and that plastered with the same sick grey



dust. It lay evenly on him, like a poisonous mask—he looked gassed with dust. Once he struggled, his head turned from side to side. He seemed to be trying to speak. It was as if his real face, clean and agonized, tried to be free and show its pain.

Now, in the long moment it takes these bombs to fly their swift distances—now the drone was already changing its note. The first remote aerial wavering, like a plane engine far up and away, had strengthened and bolted its direction upon our area. It was coming all right. We waited, though there was no time to wait, no real time but only the expansion of a moment so alert, and listened then for the drone to sharpen itself into the spluttering drum-beat of a jet-engine. But beneath this sound, separated from us by widths of sky, the little murmurs of secret life, fearful in their intimacy, could still be heard. And still fixed in a second's glance at the wounded man below, our eyes absorbed the whole courtyard, the waste of rubble between tall, torn office buildings. The iron bridge hung darkly between. Across it a new nest of broken pipes splayed up, a hydra head of snaky lead, but halted, paused like the rest of it. Only the oncoming sound moved deliberately, but this too was fixed, mounted on a straight, straight line that in its regular, unvarying crescendo provided only an emphasis to the stillness of the courtyard. A whole architecture, all that had ever been built, all the laborious metropolitan history had been returned to its waste beginning. The virgin scrap, the grey mortar earth, the courtyard walls torn and stripped into the texture of ancient moon-burnt rock—all these paused, taking breath. Only the little sounds sucking themselves in hinted at a new life, the life of leaden snakes, hesitating and choosing in whispers the way to blossom.

The drone was diving into a roar. We crouched down beneath the window. My eyes now near the floor found themselves facing a gap some three inches wide where the outer wall had loosened itself from the floorboards. The wall was leaning outwards. I saw my hand steady itself on a book of cloth patterns; the fingers were bleeding, the hand removed itself instinctively from the cleanish cloth, cut itself again on more glass on the floor. The bomb was above. We held our breaths, not in all that sound daring to breathe for fear we might miss the cut-out. It seemed much darker near the floor . . . the floor grew as dark as childhood. Only the amazing crack in the wall remained clear,

gaping its draughty mouth. The noise grew deafening, a noise now as heavy as the shadow of a wing. Then, in a burst of anger, it seemed to double up on itself, its splutter roared double, it was diving, at four hundred miles an hour, without ever cutting out, heading like all mad anger unrestrained on to the fragile roofs . . .

The wall, like a rubber wall in a Disney cartoon, sprang out at my eyes, bulging round, then snapped back into its flat self. That happened, distinctly. Whether despite the crack it had actually expanded into so round and resilient a curve, or whether the noise and the windclap of the explosion jarred this round illusion within my own round eyes—I do not know. But that happened . . . just as the silence fell again, just as the glass rain spat again, just as an iron tank went tumbling down outside, and—it seemed a long time after the explosion, we were already up at the window—the wall of the building opposite across the courtyard wobbled and then heaved its concrete down on the wounded man and his rescuers below, burying them finally. It seemed, even at that time, extra hard for the man on the stretcher.

Swiftly the life of the house blossomed. The trickling from the pipes gushed free, cascading noisily into the courtyard. Tiles, plaster, gutter fragments and more glass lurched off the roof. A new growth was sprouting everywhere, sprouting like the naked plumbing, as if these leaden entrails were the worm at the core of a birth, struggling to emerge, thrusting everything else aside. But the house held. It must have blossomed, opened, subsided upon itself. We raced down the stairs to the concrete mass below.

As we picked, hopelessly, at the great fragments, it was impossible to forget how hard it was on the man on the stretcher. It seemed, stupidly, that he alone had had no chance.

II—SOMETHING TERRIBLE,  
SOMETHING LOVELY

WILLIAM SANSOM

THE day slate-dark, the air still, the cindertrack by the cottages empty and without life in a watered middle-day light—and young Nita came running, running home from school. Her satchel swung behind her, the blue exercise book fluttered its white leaves in her windmill hand, thin long legs and young-boned knees pranced before her like the separate legs of a pony careering the rest of her along. High on the brow of the slope that led down to the cottages she was already singing it out: 'Dody! Dody!' so that her young voice shrill with life and so excited echoed round the black cindered emptiness of that path, sang in and out of the bricked cottage yards, rained against blind windows, rose and died with the tops of the green elms above the grey roofs, above the smoke that seemed to smell of cooked meat and coal.

Dody her younger cousin was squatting in the yard winding a little gramophone. The gramophone disc rotated at a wild speed, hurrying round ever faster to tin out a shrill voice that pranced up and down, as though its very bladder were bursting, bursting among the blazers and the pier-stage somewhere down the dark tin horn, screaming among the old jazz instruments to get off the stage and out of the box: 'Swanee, Swanee, How I love you, *How I love you . . .*' When Nita banged through the wooden yard gate and clustered herself feverishly down, all in one piece, satchel, hat, skirts, curls, like a bird alighting with wings askew by Dody's ear, the gramophone went on singing. She put her arm round Dody's neck and breathlessly whispered into her ear. Dody's eyes went round and fascinated, her mouth pressed itself small as though she would cry: the voice kept whispering, Nita's eyes opened and shut and rolled with every terrible word, her head waved from side to side, retreated, then back came those lips, wet and hot with breath close to the ear. 'I saw it . . . there, right in front it was, plain as day . . . I don't know how long, since yesterday I'm sure . . . anyone could see . . .' In short, dreadful gasps the whispers came out, the chattering secret. A silence, long and wise, as the two girls squatted and gazed at each other. Then from Dody a deep, heart-blown sigh. From Nita a nod,

D

then emphatic quickening nods, one after the other, racing up to get breath to tell it all again, the lovely terrible thing.

For nothing like this had ever happened before—that was plain from the start. There had been terrible things before, as when the sweetshop woman fell on the line two summers ago, on a hot afternoon, and the train had run right over her. That was terrible, especially as it had been a picnic afternoon, hot and all the flowers out—but it was funny, too, when they made jokes afterwards about strawberry jam. And there was the time when the Leadbetters had suddenly gone: one day there were all the Leadbetters, seven of them from Granny Leadbetter to little Angela, living in the cottage one door from the end—and then the next day they'd gone, there were no Leadbetters! A van had called, people said, in the night. Not a stick of a table or a chair was left in the cottage. The cottage was there still, Number Six still, but no Leadbetters! And nobody would say why or how. People knew, but there was something awful that they would never tell. They frowned, they pressed their lips into ruler-lines. 'Don't ask no questions,' they said, 'and you know what you won't be told none of.' Nita and Dody had asked for weeks, they had stood outside Number Six and peered into the windows. They had rattled the back door and kicked the empty bottles. The newspaper man had even left the Sunday paper sticking in the letterbox, the dead letterbox. Since then, no Leadbetter had ever been seen. They had gone in a hush. There was something nasty about the Leadbetters.

Those events were memorable but they were memories only, misted and vague as the uncley sort of God one heard stories about in Sunday School. But here—here was something new, alive, overwhelming, something that was happening now, at the very minute, as the clock ticked, as the church bell tolled! The church bell just then tolled suddenly, like some great celestial dustbin-lid beaten against the grey sky, and then started its measured echoing march through the September Wednesday noon. The children whispered frantically. The gramophone whirled round grating and clicking; the singing had stopped. All about that little yard, with its washing hanging abandoned, its pramwheels and cans and its derelict wooden hutch—all this stayed empty and desolate as the cinderpath. But the children felt none of it. They saw none of the lowering green leaves against that slaty sky with its

white-bottomed clouds, nor the vegetable green of the little leaves climbing the elm-trunks, nor the old tin shelters with the weeds in them and the jars of dried paintbrushes, nor the allotment beyond, nor the blanched grey of the walls of the seven cottages—a scene of only grey and heavy green and cinder-black.

‘What shall we do? What shall we do . . .?’ chattered Dody to Nita and Nita to Dody, making backwards and forwards glances wise and sophisticated, lunatic and tender. At eight and nine years of age their faces were old in gesture, their expressions poised into magical replicas of feelings that they seemed to expect rather than experience. And suddenly Nita was saying over for the twentieth time, ‘*Who* could have done it? *Who could* have done it?’ Dody jumped up and clapped her hands and began dancing. ‘Dody knows, Dody knows what we’ll do . . .’ she sang, chanted, repeated hopping round the yard with her eyes brilliant and mad. She suddenly ran back to Nita and said what was very simple, but to these two an idea of impossible daring, a breath-taking stroke. ‘It was the boys done it,’ Dody said. ‘We’ll do it back on the boys!’

They both gasped. Nita’s hand was up at her mouth. She was going to cry or to laugh, something was bursting in her. But all she did was to say in a little voice, not exactly her own: ‘What’ll we do then?’

Dody laughed and screamed delightedly: ‘We’ll do it back on the boys . . .’

‘What? What though?’ whispered Nita, who knew.

‘The same, the same!’ screamed Dody, then clapped her hand over her mouth.

Nita nestled close up to her, took her arm, ran over to the corner of the yard, then whispered more slowly but with her eyes bright with appetite for the words she knew would come but only wanted to hear over and over again: ‘Tell, tell! Tell me what we’ll do, Dody . . .’

Dody bent her head and whispered it again.

Their hot dinner never seemed to be going to end, though that in itself was delicious. Nita’s Mum, in her apron still, gave them their mutton boiled juicy grey and the white wet potatoes. And all through Nita and Dody kept tittering, staring at each other across the cruet with fearful eyes, then looking down at their

plates and spooning round the barley in that gluey pale gravy. Nita's Mum kept asking them what was the matter. Then they hung their heads, continuing on a lower plane and with slanted eyes the same exchange of secret glances and held giggles. Once Nita sang out, 'Oh dear, what can the matter be?'—but Dody, crammed with barley, nearly choked herself, and at this Nita's Mum lost patience and told them to go straight up to their bedroom without any pudding. And that was just what they wanted, to slide out on the linoleum, with the blessed door closed behind them, to leap up the stairs away from the white table-cloth and its bread-crumbs, up to the bedspread where they just burst themselves laughing and where Nita suddenly stopped and said confidentially: 'Tell, tell'.

Half an hour later Dody said, 'Where's your box? We'll need the you-know-what . . .'

Nita's face fell, suddenly blank, as though now there was something to hide. She fidgeted. Then she looked up tearfully. 'I forgot, I haven't got any.'

Dody jumped up appalled. 'Where is it? Where is it?' And when Nita pointed miserably to the washstand where, between the soap-dish and the white water-jug a pencil-box jutted out woodenly—she ran across the room and fingered it open in a second. Inside there were inkstains, a green Koh-i-noor, a stub of pink rubber stabbed with black pencil-marks, two paper-clip-hair-pins. Dody turned round wailing, 'There isn't any. There isn't any . . .'

At which Nita sat bolt upright and said, thoughtfully, tragically, slowly: 'At any rate, I've still got my penny'.

'Your penny!'

'My penny.'

'PENNY!'

In a moment they were chattering again, the penny was out, they were fingering it with love, and Dody said again and again: 'We can get lots of it now'.

'Lots of what?'

'Lots of you-know-what!'

'When?'

'Oh, now, now, now now now . . .'

Nita rose then to her feet, a dreadful pallor straining her face with age and sickness. 'Oh,' she said, 'it's Wednesday!'

'Wednesday!' Dody mouthed after her, as though she were munching something she would never swallow. 'Shop's shut!'

That night they knew they would do it tomorrow. That night was as long as one of the nights sometime before Christmas, when Christmas is near yet still will never hurry nearer, as long too as the nights of early bed in the summer when the windows were open and the music of the fair came so clearly across the common. That night the windows were open too, but outside it was dark, dark and warm, telling about the winter in the wrong way, without any cold, and thus in a queer way threatening; like some Monday nights in the kitchen with the washing about, when nobody could be bothered with you, when the minutes stopped altogether and no treats lay ahead. Tonight though, there was something ahead, but still there was the waiting, and so the room lay deadly and the electric light beaming out at the back dull and unmoving.

They were told off for bed early, as soon as that September dark came down, and when they had washed nestled near on the big pillow, sucking the stringy ends of the white coverlet, making caves in the pillow and telling, over and over again, telling. Word for word Dody knew and Nita knew exactly what was to happen, but the words themselves had to be repeated, and each time marvellously they brought the picture succulently clear.

'When'll we go to the shop?' Nita whispered.

'In breaktime.'

'What'll we ask for?'

'Chalk.'

'A ha'penny-worth?'

'Pennyworth! A whole pennyworth.'

Then there was a giggling, and suddenly Nita stopped. Her voice sounded terrified, and as though it wanted to be terrified. 'And what if someone sees? What if one of the boys comes round the corner, just then, and *sees*?'

Dody mouthed fiercely, idiotically with her tongue stuck out in the dark: 'We'll run and run and run and *run*!'

But the telling could only last minutes at a time. In between they lay in silence, thinking hard, the thoughts racing, but far too fast for the minutes, or for the long-drawn-out darkness marked only by faint noises from downstairs, from Nita's mum's cough,



from Dad's rustling paper. The light from the stairs came through the door and made a patch like a clown's hat on the ceiling. There was a soapy smell.

Once, much later, as they were at last nearly asleep, Dody pushed her head nearer and whispered, much nearer than before, and as though she had been thinking of this all the time: 'I say Nita . . .'

Nita whispered: 'Yes?'

'I say you don't . . . do you?'

A pause, fearful and long. 'Don't what Dody?'

Dody breathed quickly. 'Love Stan?'

The pillow heaved up, it was Nita turning and pressing her face hard into the pillow, gritting her teeth, stopping herself from saying anything, from crying, from laughing, from screaming, from showing any of herself even in the dark. The dark whirled round her like a blush. But then her head was up again and she laughed: 'Who, me? What you take *me* for?'

The next day was dull and low-clouded as before, the pale smoke from the cottage chimneys pencilled up paler than the sky, almost white against the dying green of the beeches above: pencilled, then blew suddenly down untidily on to the roofs, as though some huge invisible bird had swooped past. There were the beginnings of small winds, but the day was too heavy for them; the grey roofs seemed to shine against such a weight of dullness.

Though Dody and Nita had awoken early, breakfast was a scramble—and they went off to school much earlier than usual. But outside the school gates and in the playground there lay a vast emptiness, as though nothing were ever to happen again—nobody there, the doors open, and the clock outside resting its gold hands at half-past-eight. That clock seemed to have stopped. And when at last the other children came first drifting then running hot-faced in, and school was assembled, the other clock in the inky oak classroom seemed also to keep stopping. So the morning dawdled, stopping and dragging, towards breaktime, towards eleven.

At half-past ten their excitement returned, they began to feel the eyes of the others, their secret grew huge and vulnerable again. Earlier, Nita had stared blushing at her book, sure that

the others knew and were looking and laughing at her: but soon, when she had looked round, it had been disappointing to see that no one at all was taking any notice of her. Now, at twenty-five to eleven, the feeling came back: soon they were to do this thing and so it seemed that everyone knew about it. By five to eleven they were looking at each other and at the clock, it seemed an endless time—when a miracle happened! The Mistress suddenly shut the book from which she had been reading and herself looked up at the clock. Just then the clock jumped a minute forward, and this must have decided her, for she smiled and said: ‘All right. Off you go—*quietly*, children.’

They walked to the door and then bolted down the steps and out on to the asphalt, out through the gate and never stopped until they were at the shop. Nita handed over her penny clasped hot and stayed outside while Dody went in. The shop-door bell rang loud and crisp like a tram-bell, much too loud, startling, so that Nita looked fearfully up and down the street. If the boys heard, they would know—for sure, for sure! But there was only a soldier in washed blue sitting on a bench, two old ladies with shopping baskets looking at a cat. The cat rubbed itself up against their black skirts and the ladies laughed, one stroked it with her stick. The street had an empty look, no cars, no bicycles, and thus it seemed all the more empty for the ringing and echoing chattering cries of all the children hidden away in the playground round the corner. The bell clanged again and Dody crashed out holding something small hard against her breast, and nodding with her chin right in, and holding out urgently one hand to drag Nita in the direction her legs seemed already to be running. They ran together, away from the school, and Dody whispered: ‘Yellow and white pieces she gave me—lots—come on . . .’

Up the road, up the steep road, higher and higher up to the asylum! The asylum tower, purple and green, stood out above them, very near, but the asylum wall was really much further away when you were down in the streets. And the streets suddenly ended, the common began. They raced along, hurrying against the minutes, the fifteen minutes of Break, and came to where the may-bushes started and the ground rose to meet the beginning of the tall asylum wall.

Here a chalky, scrap-grass path led in between the may-bushes. Along this they ran, along by the rainy smell from under the

bushes. The wall came suddenly, and then the path continued straighter between the wall, high and purple and iron-spiked on the top, and the dark underneath of the straggling may-bush wood. The may stopped, and the other bushes withering dark-green with their dusty crimson berries—and Nita stopped too. Dody stopped. They could peer out now at the huge asylum wall curling out into the open, standing high and commanding over the open common. Deep purple and darker glazed bricks, severe and authoritative, glowered at the open grass that fanned away on all sides down from it. This wall was the summit point of the common, the place to which everyone eventually walked—and now Nita pointed in its direction and whispered: 'Look! Look! *There!*'

They looked round then fearfully. No one in sight. Only the bare common, gorse, chalk-patches, dying grass. They left the may-bushes and raced off up towards the wall, two small figures growing smaller up the slope, growing murky like half-seen flies in all that dull, dead common-land.

Later, when they had gone, the wall still stood glowering out over the empty common. Once a watery sunlight opened up and for a moment chalk boulders and something metal like a can winked weakly, the pale copper-green asylum cupola glittered into transient life. Then it was as dark, darker than before. A single cyclist was drawn slowly as on a string across some distant intersecting path. The leaves of the few straggling trees hung still, dark green and hardened, shrunk to the last point before they would turn colour. And on the wall, intimately lonely among the greater lonelines of the weather and that wide vacant space, there could be read two messages written in chalk, white on the purple brick, spidery and scrawled straight capital letters, words that looked bare and cold out there in the open:

#### NITA HOBBS LOVES STAN CHUTER

A long chalk line had been drawn through this, and underneath was written, emphatically, with yellow first letters to each word:

THE PERSON WHO WROTE THIS IS DAFT

AUGUSTUS JOHN  
FRAGMENT OF AN  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY—XV

VENICE

VIVIEN and I had made a date in Venice. As we journeyed thither by way of Paris, we met on the way an acquaintance of the Gargoyle Club. This young man informed us that he was a kind of recruiting officer, agent or courier for a luxury liner bound for Greece on a voyage where pleasure and instruction were to be combined. He strongly advised us to change our minds and take part in the expedition. Though tempted to seize this chance of setting foot on the sacred and rocky soil of Antiquity, upon further reflection we chose to stick to our original plan. For one thing the thought of being herded together with a shipload of tourists was deterring, and for another, our friend's practice of yodelling was beginning to pall on us. Yodelling is not an art for which I have much taste. It should, at any rate I think, be restricted to the Alps. And so Greece was left for another day and we landed at Venice, with relief at our narrow escape. Our hotel was conveniently placed on the Grand Canal. Opposite rose Santa Maria della Salute and a few steps brought us to the Piazza di San Marco. Nearby a baroque church reared its unbelievably hideous façade. On landing at the steps of the hotel, I was hailed from a passing gondola, 'Augustus!' The voice was Georgia Sitwell's. Evidently we were not to be alone in this city of dreams. On entering the Piazza that evening, awe-struck, we were brought to a standstill. The vast square was plunged in a ghostly silence presently to be made audible by strains of distant music. Now we saw for ourselves the so familiar silhouettes of San Marco and the Campanile, rising against the stars. My first impressions harked no further back than to Guardi, Canaletto, Longhi, Tiepolo. . . . Later it was earlier names that predominated. Strolling under the arcades, crowded by innumerable promenaders, I seemed to recognize the sardonic features of Casanova: a silken domino, its folds parting, permitted a

glimpse of a sword-hilt and a rose. The vision was but momentary, for the tall athletic figure hastily disappeared. As an alternative to the Piazza, a favourite haunt at that time was Harry's Bar. Here we met our expected friends the Melchetts and numerous others: Cecil Beaton, attired for this occasion in a kind of glorified version of an Eton boy's costume, was to be encountered everywhere; Sacheverell Sitwell, somewhat aloof and seemingly preoccupied, as a poet should be, together with the elegant Georgia, Mrs. Peto (Ruby), with her son Timothy, whose tender years did not prevent his paying ardent court to my daughter; this juvenile passion was no joke, for I learnt that the charming child had to be put to bed of a species of brain-fever on the departure of his inaccessible mistress. The Baroness Catherine d'Erlanger was often visible: in the half-light of the Piazza, she plunged amidst the throng with the appearance of a living Veronese; my Berlin friend Lally Horstman, too, graced the scene, her style of beauty conveying a suggestion of the mysterious East; the young Count Labia, whose father's palaces, decorated profusely by Tiepolo, were among the chief sights of Venice, invariably charming but always tired—except on the tennis-courts or when rowing in the Bucentaur: Miss Hoyty Wiborg, of the U.S.A., disputed the venerability of the name Labia. 'It only means *lips*,' she said scornfully—but inaccurately. Lord Alington's sister, Lois Sturt, always accompanied by a zoological friend, joined us in some of our expeditions, but seemed a little bored—Tintoretto isn't everybody's cup of tea. . . . We were presented to the beautiful Aspasia, who offered us hospitality on a neighbouring island. She seemed to me to realize all the implications of her name and station, and her young daughter promised an equal perfection. At a party in one of the Palazzi, Lifar, the Russian ballet dancer, was due to perform. Extending himself on the lid of a grand piano, as though in voluptuous slumber, he appeared to awake, and as if still half a-dream, descended and was beginning to move rhythmically upon the floor with that *maitrise* to which he had accustomed us, when to everybody's astonishment and Lifar's too it seemed, Lady Melchett appeared, looking in her white peplum like a Greek divinity, and joining with the master, the two performed an extempore dance which revived, very creditably, memories of Attic vase-painting of the ripest period.

The applause was deafening. Such were our almost nightly diversions. I wished Ronald Firbank could have been with us. How *he* would have enjoyed it all! And how I would have enjoyed his enjoyment! During the day there were the pictures to be viewed or the Lido to be visited for bathing purposes. Certainly the water was delicious, but the crowded beach revealed, to me at least, a certain crudity in humanity which I would have preferred to ignore. Human beings appear to disadvantage in circumstances to which only sandhoppers are strictly adapted. A former acquaintance of mine, one Charles Winzer, having spotted me, now began to exhibit a friendly assiduity which I thought excessive. It was with anxiety that we descended to make our morning exit from the hotel, for we were almost sure to find Winzer in attendance on the terrace. It is true that his companion, a young Russian nobleman, had developed a passion for my daughter. 'The girl,' as he put it, 'of his dreams': this was only normal. But I didn't fancy taking the place of Lifar in the reveries of Winzer. These two were inseparable on the Lido. Winzer had once described himself as a 'voluptuary' and I thought this 'let me out': what then could account for a persistence I could not respond to and which visibly bored me? Was it possible that the Prince's defection had inspired Charley to pay him out by ostentatiously transferring his attentions to me? In any case I would resent being made the cat's paw of an intrigue. It will be observed that I took a modest view of the situation. Winzer lived in a 'Palazzo' a good way off and only once I was persuaded to visit it. The ascent to his quarters under the roof was long and exhausting, but once arrived I appreciated the spacious, airy rooms, simply, even austere furnished (for Winzer was not without taste as an artist of some sophistication): I was especially grateful for the good wine with which he revived me after my exertions. He proceeded to show me his works with much solemnity. A light began to dawn on me at last! His interest in me was explained. He had only been planning to dazzle me by the proofs of his rare gifts, which would oblige me as a conscientious critic to boost him to good purpose in England, a country he proposed shortly to visit. With relief, I left the studio, though encumbered by a portfolio of lithographs he had pressed upon me on parting. Our relations henceforward became more light-hearted, at any rate on my side. Meanwhile the air of Venice

was getting me down. I became more and more indolent. I had done a fair share of sightseeing and now wouldn't move a step for a Tiepolo. I had his *Scherzi di Phantasia* at home and much preferred them to his neckbreaking ceilings. But it was the people I was tired of most. My God, what a set! I remarked to Melchett; he agreed. I was seeing less of Vivien. The Russian onslaught had not been altogether ineffective, but at last even my daughter agreed it was time to depart. Almost at the last moment she realized she had failed to 'do' the Doges' Palace. In a panic she rushed through it in about a quarter of an hour, which must be a record. I would perhaps go back to Venice if somebody would get me a studio.

★            ★            ★

I had been staying near Newquay, where my son, Henry Elphin, came to grief. On hearing of his disappearance, I at once went down to my sister-in-law, Ethel Nettleship's bungalow, to take part in the search. This search took a fortnight. My brilliant son had distinguished himself outstandingly at Stoneyhurst, and was regarded by Fathers Martindale and d'Arcy as a paragon of intellect and piety. In him, in fact, the neo-Thomist movement had found its most promising recruit. He had already taken his preliminary vows at Manresa College and his emergence in due course as a priest of the Society of Jesus was understood. Latterly, however, his behaviour, formerly so exemplary though not without symptoms of extravagance, began to show disconcerting and even alarming tendencies. Though these in no way endangered others, his own safety and health were sometimes seriously imperilled by a recklessness which none could restrain. Apart from foolhardy exploits his frequentations among the scum of the East End, however inspired, were, considering his habitual carelessness, distinctly insalubrious. Though he observed scrupulously the dictates of charity I sometimes used to suspect him of being moved as much by contempt for his unfortunate fellows as by love of them. He noticeably avoided looking at any young female in whose company he might find himself: thus carrying out in this and other respects the injunctions of de Loyola no matter in what way he might be privately affected. His religious training in fact seemed to make necessary and inevitable a complete blindness to the realities of the senses. In his early boyhood



he had made some remarkable essays in poetry which later he would not hear of without impatience, but appeared to find immense satisfaction in Rimbaud and Gerald Manly Hopkins. He thought highly of G. K. Chesterton, who reciprocated this judgement and carried on an intellectual liaison with Wyndham Lewis and Cecil Gray. Like all Puritans he was sometimes capable of a surprising grossness of speech and was always ready to indulge a wild and uproarious sense of fun: his singular good looks had been modified by a blow on the nose, incurred in boxing, for he practised this art as well as that of Ju-jitsu. He used to attempt to proselytize me, but his stigmatization of me as a 'bloody fool' for refusing to see the light, failed to weaken me. One day he was engaged in this activity and was pointing out how much I had to gain and how little to lose, if anything, by conversion, when at that moment, my sister Gwen, herself a convert, appeared on the scene and overhearing this argument, at once contradicted her learned nephew with the statement that one accepted the truth, not as a business transaction, but for the love of God, even if this might lead to disaster or death itself; 'as if that mattered,' she added contemptuously and left the room. The young casuist was silenced.

As time went on, it became evident that a revolution was taking place in Henry's soul. The eccentricities I have alluded to were the outward manifestations of an inner conflict. He now began to cut adrift from the friends of his faith. His superiors at last were forced to admit his evident lack of a vocation and with admirable good sense, though with profound disappointment, decided to release him from his vows. He thus left the Jesuit Order but not without testifying the greatest regard and esteem for the splendid body of men with whom his lot had hitherto been cast. He was now free though in an unaccustomed world; but he could now open his eyes fearlessly and survey it afresh. There was so much yet to be learnt to supplement his reading! Having instructed his aunt Ethel to vacate her bungalow at Crantock, he proceeded thither to await the arrival of the young lady with whom he had made a rendezvous: but this experiment in natural history was not to take place. Driving out one stormy evening in his dilapidated Buick to bathe, he left the car on the verge of the cliffs and descending, plunged from the rocks. . . . About a fortnight later the body was brought ashore some miles further

south and though featureless through the attentions of birds and crabs, I was able to identify it.

Meanwhile I had been daily exploring the coast in the vicinity with a motor boat. I got on good terms with a colony of seals, who at first viewed me with suspicion, but later seemed to accept me as an uncouth but innocent stranger. These charming animals, emerging from the water, reminded me of the Irish Red Setters we used to rear. Cormorants gathered sociably on their favourite rock and puffins or sea-parrots as usual went about their business in a hurry. The only people I had to fear were the journalists, who, on hearing of the sad event had quickly assembled to importune me for a 'Story', which they would proceed to 'write up' in a travesty of style and sentiment as odious as it was misleading. Two of them who had been tracking me for days, on one occasion did catch me as I landed on the pier and approaching, began to ply me with questions and sympathy. Ineffably bored but now well on my guard, I remained mum. The result was I was reported in thick type to be 'speechless with grief'. Even my silence was turned to account! Father d'Arcy S.J. came down to perform the funeral rites, accompanied and assisted at the ceremony by one, Tom Burns, an old schoolfellow of Henry's, but one of those with whom he had lately broken contact. This man is now reported to be in close association with General Franco. Others present at the funeral were my wife, Edith Nettleship, my son Caspar and the two daughters.

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In 1930, I think, a memorial exhibition of Van Gogh was held at Amsterdam. Sybil Vincent, Dorelia, David Fincham and I, determined not to miss it and set out for Holland together. Many years had passed since I had been in Amsterdam. In the meantime much building and rebuilding had been going on, to alter drastically some aspects of the city. The huge modern blocks of apartments with their horizontal lines were thoroughly out of keeping with the old perpendicular style of building. There was no doubt which of the two I preferred. The fact that an architect of the name of Van t'Hoff had designed my house and studio in Mallord Street, Chelsea, didn't prejudice me in favour of Dutch modernism. It is true my house was a compromise. Van t'Hoff had even imported black Dutch pan-tiles for

his high-pitched roof, but with his up-to-date prepossession for straight lines had spared me the characteristic curved gable. I love the tall narrow houses which line the canals of old Amsterdam. Gazing at them, I seem to have returned as in a dream to the great epoch and to be in the company of Rembrandt, Spinoza and Descartes. These gracious façades, so carefully tended, the warm dark bricks, well waxed, polished and re-pointed, have no appearance of dilapidation. They have the mellow substance and quietude of Pieter de Hooch and the *craquelé* of the years has improved them. But the inhabitants have changed. No longer leisurely, they keep well abreast of the times—on bicycles: their costumes or rather costume, for there is now only one, reduced to the limits of decent austerity, has been purged of every trace of the slightly swaggering and yet sober elegance which their jaunty forefathers used to indulge in. In spite of the advantages of uniformity and the security which is the compensation of dullness, I, for one, sometimes regret the variety, colour and style of a more ceremonious and expansive age. The Van Gogh Show was tremendous. Here at the Ryksmuseum was assembled the greater part of the artist's life-work, comprising both the better-known brightly coloured productions of his later period and those of the early years passed in Holland and Belgium. These dark canvases, I thought, in essence, just as good as those painted under the revelation of the Provençal sun. A diet of potatoes and schnapps in the Borinage seems to have been no less stimulating to Vincent's extraordinary constitution than one of aioli and absinthe in Arles. But in any climate this man would have found himself in the same company. Like Christ, he belongs to the universal fellowship of the poor, the unsophisticated, the exploited, the lowly and the condemned. Unhappily Van Gogh's imagination, inflamed by adversity, excites his *mystique* of misfortune to the point of paranoia: his naïve and passionate nature, for ever meeting with rebuffs, turns murderous or suicidal: he attacks the adored, the athletic, the supercilious Gauguin, with a hatchet: he cuts off his ear and sends it with his compliments to a prostituted girl. The distracted fellow is jeered at in the street as he passes dishevelled and muttering, followed by the maddening cry '*Fou-roux, fou-roux, fou-roux*'. It is time to lock this lunatic up . . . Good-bye little yellow house! Good-bye postman. *Adieu le bordell!* But there is always a Dr. Gachet and on the sick

man's release from the asylum, he takes refuge with this good little bore, who is sympathetic but not really serious: he doesn't even take the trouble to get his Pissarro's framed, but leaves them knocking about anyhow! This is too much! Vincent takes out his revolver but on second thoughts turns it against himself. So smoking his pipe amidst his pictures he is cured at last, but not by the apothecary. . .

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Some musical admirers of James Joyce planned to present him with a book of their compositions in his honour. I was invited to contribute a drawing of Joyce as my share of the homage to be paid him. I agreed to do so. I was to proceed to Paris alone on leaving Amsterdam. Our parting conversation on the platform almost lost me my train which was already moving out of the station when with a desperate leap I boarded it minus my portmanteau. I established myself in a modern studio building in the Rue Delambre near the Café du Dôme. There was a Bar on the ground floor and one could get meals sent up. Very chic! But the bold pattern of the studio wall-paper, though no doubt fashionable, disturbed me seriously. What was to be done? An Indian woman with whom I was friendly solved the problem. Obtaining many sheets of brown paper, and borrowing a ladder, she pinned them over the offending decoration and I recovered my peace of mind. Sunita was very helpful during this sojourn in Paris. Her sister, Milly, of darker colouring, was just as beautiful in her way. We used to meet in the Select Bar where one could have a dish of *saucisses* and *choucroute* without moving. This Bar wasn't really very select. It was largely frequented by psychological oddities; but *en revanche*, the Indian girls and I were exceedingly normal. Sunita, later on, had to return to India and her husband, her 'old man' as she called him. She never came back and her death was reported later. Perhaps she had broken too many of the rules and her favourite divinity, Kali, had not protected her. . . . Joyce posed well and frequently. I did a number of drawings of him. He had a precise and buttoned-up appearance, but would relax perceptibly during the course of dinner. Mrs. Joyce, a Galway woman, on one occasion had to call him to order: the beneficent effect of the wine was all too marked in her opinion. Their flat was a model

of bourgeois comfort and propriety. Its shining brass fire-fittings, plush table cover and indifferent pictures seemed to have been specially imported from Ireland. Before we parted Joyce gave me a French translation of *Ulysses*. A group of literary men had been employed for years making this. I asked how they got the Dublin accent into French. Joyce replied rather huffily that a local dialect had been made use of. My own original *Ulysses* I had lent to Will Rothenstein, I never saw it again. I wanted to compare the two. I recited one of his 'poems' but hesitated over a word. He supplied it instantly. In spite of his long and permanent exile Joyce's heart was always in the Liffey. He and Oliver Gogarty had been close companions of old, sharing a Martello tower on Dublin bay. Neither, in my hearing, mentioned the other once. This, with Irishmen, may be taken as a compliment. I have read the recently published but older version of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It seemed to me better than the other one. What magical writing! Joyce would keep referring to a mysterious singer of the name of O'Sullivan. This great artist, I gathered, was not appreciated. He pressed me to use my good offices with Lady Cunard to get him recognized and employed in Grand Opera. But O'Sullivan, Wyndham Lewis told me, was an *idée fixe* and like 'Mrs. Harris', there 'was no such a person'. Joyce, although almost blind, took a great interest in my efforts, examining them microscopically through his double lenses. He explained that the poverty of his beard was due to an early accident to his chin, but I didn't feel justified in restoring the missing growth. In spite of his cold and formal exterior I was much drawn to James Joyce, and, to his consternation, embraced him on parting.

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Above my studio was that of the Czech painter, Oscar Kokoshka. He was painting Milly or rather transcribing her into his own particular idiom. I thought a less attractive model would have served his purpose just as well, and so did Milly. In response to his appeals, I took a good deal of trouble later on to get Kokoshka out of Prague by official aeroplane when he stood in danger of internment in Dachau. Although this charming, eccentric and gifted fellow didn't take advantage of my exertions on his behalf, I'm glad to say he did get away in the end and is, I believe, now safe in this country.

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It was after a more recent visit to Paris that I came away in the company of Mathew Smith and Alden Brooks in the former's car. Brooks, a sympathetic American, has at last hit on the true identity of Shakespeare, and that of the author of the plays and some of the sonnets. His book, *The Dyer's Hand*, records his sleuth-like researches into these matters, and the epoch-making conclusions which were the outcome. It is about equivalent to the discovery of America by Columbus: I recommend it. I had, on this occasion, hired a studio from Richard Wyndham. It overlooked the cemetery of Montparnasse. Not having seen it previously I was appalled on entering by its character. It had a glass table, aluminium chairs, shiny curtains of American cloth and decorations by Richard Wyndham himself. I found myself in a futuristic pill-box giving on the grave. Naturally work was out of the question in this atmosphere and even sleep was difficult. I soon got out of it and, vomiting freely, was carted away by Mathew. On the way the aspect of the Ile de France overcame me. The landscape in this country under the loveliest light imaginable had an opulence which might have been borrowed from my friend's palette. But could such a green be rendered except in painted glass, I asked myself, looking at the trees? With what reluctance I was swept on towards a destination, promising as I thought, only diluted hues compared with this magnificence! But, on surmounting the white bastions of Kent and entering the garden, as Brooks puts it, of 'our hardy island race'. I was undeceived. Here too the colours of the landscape were as bright and rich as seen through medieval windows! How mysterious is the power of 'Nature' as it used to be called. We submit eagerly to it, and in this surrender no penalty threatens, no reward entices. We feel, for once, innocent and free. Sex, that gushing fount of beauty and terror, seems not to enter here unless by accident and as a subsidiary episode: a huddle in the shade, a flutter of drapery, a gleaming limb . . . The sun, in our mild zone, must share dominion with the clouds. This rivalry leads more often, to harmonious collusion, by which all parties gain, than strife. The great luminary, whose naked majesty, in the tropics, intimidates rather than charms, with us, veiled as it were, in gossamer, sheds beams which we may contemplate at ease and bask in fearlessly. Besides, our changing skies are fraught with a variety of form and colour more interesting in

the long run than a splendid but perpetual blue. Doubtless we may have to watch long for the divine conjunction, but it's worth it when it comes. The spectacle of a superb sunset and sometimes even an inferior one, arouses in us emotions of religious nostalgia: we see, beyond the ocean's rim, glimpses of Beulahland, the Happy Hunting Grounds, the Islands of the Blest, etc., according to where we come from. Feeling elevated and purer, we pursue our way home, lingeringly, often turning to watch the fading glory while promising ourselves to be better men in future. This laudable frame of mind, however, is apt to prove as transitory as the phenomena which gave it rise, and our former baseness or impurity soon resumes the upper hand though perhaps under a thicker disguise than before. Only few can aspire to saintliness and fewer achieve it. For the common run of mankind, a state of original sin seems to be natural, obligatory and permanent. We had better accept our destiny then, and make the best of it. By acknowledging our 'guilt' we may remove its sting and if we have to sacrifice something let it be hypocrisy for a start. In any case we should not depend entirely on the weather for spiritual uplift—not in this country.

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'The Blue Kailin' was a tiny restaurant on Cheyne Walk near Chelsea Old Church. It stood back from the road in a corner called Don Saltero's. Nazi bombers, possibly aiming at Lots Road Power Station nearby, have obliterated all this, and with the collusion of Big-business and the speculative builder—'free-enterprise' in fact—yet another vestige of the Chelsea Whistler knew has disappeared. The little restaurant under the grimace of the engaging Chinese monster which gave it its name was kept by Mrs. Osborn. In surroundings of a tasteful homeliness meals were served which though not copious were always well cooked. The clever little lady of the house, herself prepared the dishes and, given a sufficiently receptive guest, was apt to accompany them with a sprightly flow of genuine Oscarian fun and persiflage. The establishment, in short, set out to cater less for the needs of the million than the 'happy few'. By the fireplace in the corner, a rather silent and dejected figure used to sit and smoke; this was William Osborn, the husband of our hostess. I came to know him with Henry Lamb, a young artist,



lately arrived from Manchester. Soon the three of us became intimate and spent a good deal of time together. We found a community of interest in the discussion of Art, for Osborn, too, was a painter. Our senior in years, 'Billy' seemed to be vastly our superior in knowledge. Undemonstrative, shy and reserved he would warm up after a few tankards of beer at the 'Eight Bells' and lead us to suspect in him an outlook, a conviction, a secret which we longed to understand and share. Here, we divined, was an aesthete with a message. Drawing our attention to the screens of ground glass which in this democratic country are provided to shield the gentry of the 'Saloon' from observation and possibly recognition by the loafers in the 'Public' Bar opposite, Billy praised their exquisite tonality: the banal devices mechanically engraved on their surface permitted, he pointed out, a play of light of a positively *Chinese* subtlety. Astonished, we regarded these objects: By Heaven, he was right! The detestable contrivances now shone softly with the translucency of jade . . . An elegant but rather dilapidated row of houses in the King's Road, with their stucco in patches, reminded Billy of a bevy of ravaged ladies trying to dissimulate their age under a reckless application of rouge . . .! Our mentor claimed that he could paint in any light: by a methodical transposition of colour, he knew how to control and deal with Nature in any mood. This was theory, but practically of course, he preferred the weather to accommodate itself to his palette, as, in London, it so often did. When the sun, as if enclosed in an alabaster bowl, penetrated this and infused the smoky veils of the monstrous city with a discreet and purifying glow, reducing the unnecessary, the incongruous and the obtrusive to order and agreement and turning the towers and factories of Battersea to muted silhouettes, at one with the silvery river and joining with the trees on the Embankment in a single indivisible pattern, there was Osborn's idea realized; there was his harmony ready-made; this was his hour! He used few colours and those sparingly. Black was his basic pigment. 'As for rose,' he said, 'a little burnt umber and white is all you need.' 'Perspective?' 'Ignore it.' At one time a successful painter in a more popular vein, he had suddenly 'seen the light'. In instant submission, he burnt his boats with his pictures and entered a more magical but lonelier world. No doubt Whistler's example had something to do with

this conversion but above all the subtleties of Chinese painting, which he was always referring to, obsessed him. Before such excellencies he became too conscious of his own inadequacy and to his cup of bitterness an unfortunate love-affair, contributed a fatal superfluity. He would appear sometimes, strangely absent and unresponsive. I noticed then that his eyes showed no pupils but were only dark unilluminated wells of pain. Dope: that's what it meant. Faithful to his masters, he had even adopted their vices. In gayer moments he used to say, 'Some day I'm going to show you a trick'. When I heard of his death, I didn't need to be told what the trick was . . .

## SELECTED NOTICES

### BACK TO VICTORIA<sup>1</sup>

JUST as we left the theatre the sirens started, so that we stepped straight from a period elegance into the crude present dangerous dreariness of the blackout. The title of the play we had seen is not important. When I remember it I only see the lighted stage hanging in darkness like a full-blown tea-rose—one of those pinkish-gold roses of an almost Chinese simplicity, with specially frail petals which open to a specially generous fullness, and fall at the lightest touch.

The friend with me was so entranced by the dream of a graceful past that even the hideous wartime alarm failed to rouse her, and later I tried to find out which element of the play had worked such a powerful spell. It was the sense of leisured security, she told me: the timeless feeling of ease in which every grace, every accomplishment could develop in its own way, at its own speed, without being forced or deformed by the pressure of outside necessity. 'If only we could go back to those days! How wonderful it would be to have time to enjoy one's emotions! How delightful to recline, beautifully dressed, on a beautiful *chaise longue*, surrounded by affectionate intelligent friends, with plenty of devoted, admirably trained servants to anticipate all one's whims! What a pleasure a broken heart could be in such circumstances!'

Since that war winter, nostalgia for the past has become an even more noticeable feature of our escapist entertainment demands. A remarkable number of recent stage and screen successes—including an opera which has

<sup>1</sup> *Curious Relations*. By William D'Arfey, edited by William Plomer. Jonathan Cape, 8s.

*Novels of Mystery from the Victorian Age*. Chosen, with an introduction by Maurice Richardson. Pilot Press, 15s.

been called the 'cultural event' of 1945—have been set in the past or derived from past history. Where books are concerned, one has only to recall a few of the big best-sellers to find that the same thing holds good. It almost appears as if any popular art-form must, if it is to succeed, have a non-contemporary atmosphere.

Unless this thesis is accepted, it is hard to explain the format of such a book as *Curious Relations*, which is published as 'the memoirs of William D'Arfey, edited by William Plomer'. I do not know whether any two families existing in Victorian and Edwardian times have been used as the prototypes of the D'Arfey and Mountfaucons. I do not know if Mr. Plomer had access to any authentic memoirs upon which he based his satirical, lively, light-hearted, uninhibited tales. If these fantastic people and sometimes incredible, always entertaining, incidents do not spring entirely from his imagination, they surely can bear little resemblance to their original sources. Great liberties must have been taken with the family album in order to produce such eccentric portraits, such a grouping of degenerate, startling and amusing figures. Mr. Plomer's writing is very much alive; it is independent, witty and cynical; it adopts no poses and points no moral; it might well be called 'modern'. Why, then, does he put his characters into fancy dress? Why does his book appear in a period costume? Except for its milieu and an allowance of those graces which once so charmed my friend, it has nothing in common with past times. Its oddities would, one feels, be equally at home, and would lose none of their oddness, if they were transposed to the present. Can there possibly be a question of conforming to fashion somewhere in the background? Looking along the shelves of book-shops and libraries, one wonders why these novels and novelists of the past, especially of the Victorian past, are so much in demand. Their popularity is more than a passing craze and is worth an investigation.

A publisher's list is always an illuminating document. It is an index of social tendencies; a chart of collective psychological trends. There has recently been an increase in the paper quota, and the way in which the publisher distributes the extra pages at his disposal is of significant interest. One might expect preference to go to new names and experimental forms appropriate to the inchoate fluidity of a time when culture as previously known is almost certainly ending. In actual fact, most, if not all the fresh allocation is devoted to reprints—often excessively long. Works, familiar to us since childhood, crowd new writers and non-traditional writing out of a list reminiscent of the catalogue of a school library.

The truth is, of course, that inner and outer reality do not so much correspond as balance each other. Chaos and uncertainty outside must be compensated by a solid stability within. Hence the extraordinary favour shown to the Victorians who, while somewhat lacking in gracious qualities, certainly possessed another characteristic typical of a safe and leisurely existence—an unshakable assurance, victorious over everything but the grave.

People in strange frightening situations instinctively look back in search of some reassuring precedent in the past. Extreme insecurity in the outer environment is counterbalanced by the extremity of inward recession; the retreat to infantilism, the ultimate flight to the womb. The human race is now

facing its most fearful predicament: a certain scientific precociousness has accidentally precipitated a crisis for which humanity is, emotionally and intellectually, quite unprepared.

When laws, immemorially accepted as absolute, suddenly prove unstable as the wind, a collective human sense of insecurity becomes mobilized. The old gods have vanished; but neither Christ nor Quetzalcoatl comes to replace them. Confused, unable to understand a state of affairs so far beyond our experience and our development, we see only that things around us are changing, that the earth under our feet crumbles and falls away. In this terrifying situation we are all, whether consciously or not, in the greatest possible need of something which will stand firm: something which can be trusted not to turn one day into a shape of dread.

Only the most mature human beings can bear to look our present reality in the face. For the survival of the rest, some form of escape is an essential condition. Humanity looks back in search of a sanctuary, because to look in any other direction is to encounter the treacherous unknown. Only the past is finite, and, being crystallized, cannot betray. We run away, so to speak, backwards. This childish reaction of flight which has become so general, demonstrates strikingly the predominance of immaturity, and is at the back of the craze for all forms of Victorianism. The structure of the Victorian age could, in many of its aspects, be described as a society of children: while we, escaping into the nursery of that snug, self-confident era, are ourselves the new Victorians.

The demand for an omnibus volume of Victorian Novels of Mystery illustrates this very well. Mr. Richardson, who has chosen the four books published together by the Pilot Press, tells us in his foreword that they are 'leisure reading', suited to people 'not quite grown-up', and making no demands on the intellect. I am not going to attempt to describe their contents. Two of them have been well-known for years. *The Woman in White* is immensely long, immensely complicated, and celebrated mainly for introducing the enormous, delightfully villainous Count Fosco and his 'darling children', the family of white mice. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has won additional fame as an early 'split personality' story by being made into a film. Of the two remaining lesser-known novels, one is a vampire story with some charming touches which almost turn it into a macabre fairy-tale: the other a domestic thriller in the *Woman in White* style, but shorter and, though just as sensational, less effective. Maurice Richardson has written a stimulating and excellent introduction which provides all four mysteries with a frame so entirely right that there seems no need for further objective comment.

From the subjective angle, the collection is a mass of fascinating material. The title itself, *Novels of Mystery*, leads straight into the new Victorian atmosphere, via its final word. Mystery: what did the writers of the period mean to convey by this term? Looking into their work, one very soon sees that their concept of mystery was strictly limited to the concrete. Nowhere in these books is there to be found anything which is mysterious in the metaphysical sense. No mystic enigma lurks behind the commonplaces of everyday. Even where the supernatural puts in an appearance, it is described in the matter-of-fact terminology of the material world. The vampire in *Carmilla*, for instance,

'about four or five feet long' (the same length as the hearthrug, is carefully noted), a 'sooty-black animal that resembled a monstrous cat', and which 'leaps lightly' on to its victim's bed. Not only does the girl-victim suffer physical pain 'as if two large needles had darted, an inch or two apart, into her breast' as a result of the blood-sucking, but she sustains a wound visible to other people, including the doctor who examines her with engaging delicacy ('You won't mind your papa's lowering your dress a very little').

This concretism is characteristic, and fixes the nursery background of the whole picture. A child thinks of himself solely in terms of the physical self that has to be clothed, washed and fed; an attitude precisely similar to that of the Victorians, to whom the ego was one solid entity, without spiritual complications. Nor did their materialistic evaluation cease with the individual: it extended to every detail of the environment in which they moved. People and things, plants and animals (and apparently even vampires), were alike objects consisting of matter—nothing but matter. In other words, mystery in the full meaning of the term, had no place in the Victorian scene. Things were just what they appeared to be; no shocks; no inexplicable metamorphoses. What a safe, simple, happy state of affairs! What a peaceful haven for the scared lost bewildered children of our time! No wonder these non-mysterious Mysteries are far more popular than the work of intellectual writers whose interpretation of life, based on the more abstract thought-forms of psychology and logistics, makes greater demands on the reader without affording him an equivalent refuge.

New Victorianism is not, of course, entirely the result of post-war insecurity. Potential anarchy and global chaos have given a mighty impulse to the backward drive. But society at all times contains a large number of individuals whose development has not progressed beyond Victorian nursery level: people to whom nothing is valuable which cannot be handled and turned into hard cash. Unfortunately, the stress of living in what H. G. Wells calls the 'twilight of mankind' has enormously increased the number of people who think only in terms of ownership. Many who are puzzled and timid, persons of good will but weak moral fibre, have been checked in their development and, instead of advancing, have turned back in alarm. Their retrogression is authorized, as it were, by the world situation.

Thus the isolation of the mature individual becomes greater than ever. For, broadly speaking, all who, in their uncertainty, abandon the hard abstractions of thought in order to fall back on the prop of concretism; all who write books in this vein as well as those who read them, belong to the ranks of the modern Victorians. Their society, based on the absolute and exclusive power of wealth, has aptly taken a return to the gold standard as a symbol of its material origin. The escapist members of this not brave, not new, order, have indeed returned to the ideology of the nursery. Afraid of the vast indifferent world, they cling to the familiar safety of everyday domestic objects; houses, chairs, beds; things which comfort the mind as they support the body. To the child, body and mind are one.

Psychologically speaking, love has been degraded from the form-and-beauty fixation and reduced to the possessive stage. The insistent craving for support and comfort typifies the sedentary attitudes and postures characteristic of anal

functions. Victorian life in its entirety might, in fact, be regarded as a manifestation of the anal complex operating upon the group psyche. The vampires and villains of the mystery stories; their fears and horrors which never become real because at any moment they can be banished; all these stem from the sadistic aspect of the same infantile fixation.

Infantile is the operative word. The greater the pressure of anxiety upon the individual, the more urgent becomes his need to escape. What could be a better symbol of infantile safety than the womb-like interior of one of these huge, over-prosperous, over-padded mansions, full of red plush, and with several pairs of heavy dark curtains shrouding each window? To read the description of such a house is to receive an astonishing sense of protective seclusion. One gets the impression of a place designed to exclude rather than to welcome: an elaborate involuted structure within which the proprietor lies at ease embedded in inaccessible idleness, like an earwig inside a deep crimson dahlia. If an intruder ever eluded the servants, male and female, who barred his approach, he would be trapped in the maze of passages where no hint of his presence would pass the baize-covered doors between him and the master's rooms. Those rich, over-crowded rooms would be always artificially lighted; the curtains perpetually drawn. Or, if a window did happen to be uncovered, it would surely look out upon a conventional romantic view with a sham bridge or an imitation tower in the middle distance.

The life the Victorian writers describe is essentially an indoor affair; sheltered and shut away from the least chill of outside realism. Valuable objects—by which is meant possessions of recognized cash value—are catalogued in detail; even underclothes being thought worth a painstaking sentence or two. Scenic delineations, on the other hand, are perfunctory and stereotyped. Except in certain instances relating to private property, nature is used simply as a back-cloth; a series of convenient stage effects to suit standard situations. A similar technique is employed in characterization. The men and women acting in these melodramas are merely puppets who play their stock rôles in a dolls' theatre; never human beings. Their horrific experiences are no more than a projection of childish sadism. And because neither play nor players rise above the level of the puppet show, the adult reader is unmoved—unless he is moved to laughter.

If one compares the 'horrors' to be found in this volume with the horror-content of the work of an adult intellectual writer, the reason for the artistic failure of the Victorians as well as for the preference shown to them becomes clear. The mature artist's work is the outcome of his own experience; his own thought, imagination, emotion. It is his own death which Kafka describes in the terrible last paragraph of *The Trial* when the knife is turned twice in K's heart. The whole of Kafka's life is in the book as well as his last moments. And the poor, crazy man in *The Overcoat* is mad Gogol himself.

Writers of the quality of Kafka and Gogol do not run away from reality. They have too much integrity, both as artists and human beings, to indulge in escapist flights. Especially sensitive, they are especially vulnerable, and they escape nothing. When life frightens and hurts them, they do not look back at the nursery windows with longing eyes, but incorporate in themselves a part of life's fear and pain. The artistic value of their work endures because

it is also a part of reality. It is conscious, uncompromising, personal, true. It is life. It is everything the new Victorian tries to avoid.

ANNA KAVAN

### SOME RECENT FRENCH BOOKS

*Les Chemins de la Liberté*. By Jean-Paul Sartre. Gallimard, Paris. Vol. I. *L'âge de Raison*. 125 francs. Vol. II. *Le Sursis*. 150 francs.

THESE two volumes are to be completed by a third which has not yet appeared, but, although the final tableau is hidden from us, the first and second acts place the characters in situations which are almost complete in themselves as their backgrounds are historic periods which, however much they belong to our recent lives, are irrevocably rounded off.

*Les Chemins de la Liberté* is essentially a *roman à these*, and the search for liberty is conducted not only in the private lives of the characters but also on that other front of tanks and guns whose dull thuds envelop the book—in the first volume it is the War in Spain, and in the second volume the late War.

The technique used is the same in both these books. Cross sections from the lives of the characters are juxtaposed so as to give the illusion of a simultaneous vision into their actions. In *L'âge de Raison* this is to some extent successful, but in the *Le Sursis* the pace is accelerated and the passages dealing with the various characters run into each other, so that, in the same line, a thought can be begun in North Africa and concluded in Paris or Czechoslovakia—a device to get even with the machinations of Time, who, however, nearly always, has another trick up its sleeve in the mind of the reader.

The central figure of *L'âge de Raison* is Mathieu Delarue, aged 33, professor of philosophy, in love with Ivich, a young Russian girl, while his permanent mistress with whom he has had a long-standing affair, tells in the opening pages that she is pregnant. The action of the book takes place within two days—two days in which Mathieu has to find 5000 francs so that she can have the abortion she doesn't want, half of which he spends with Ivich, making futile gestures to impress her and hating her for his humiliations, and this search, this predicament throw up at him the questions he least wants to face: why he is doing what he is doing, why is he what he is, and are they both justified. His life has been concentrated on the achievement of one object: 'Être libre, être cause de soi, pouvoir dire: je suis parceque je le veux: être mon propre commencement.' His predicament is that of all intelligent, self-conscious people who lack the driving force of a creative gift or depth of emotion, who through fear of making a mistake never do anything really right, and who in spite of a life spent in defending a principle are liable to lose the battle before they start because their principle is really another name for fear or laziness. Although he can inspire devotion in his pupils, as Mathieu does in Ivich's brother Boris, and romantic interest in his bored sister-in-law, Mathieu remains the typical young don, attractive, but not quite attractive enough, basically anti-pleasure, going to night clubs but never enjoying himself in them, because he can't dance, isn't very good at flirting, buys champagne as a gesture, but would be



quite as happy with a pint of bitter, whose life could easily end with no other memorial but 'sa vie avait été versée dans les archives de la troisième République; ses dépenses quotidiennes alimenteraient les statistiques concernant le niveau de vie des classes moyennes après 1918, ses lettres serviraient de documents à l'histoire de la bourgeoisie entre les deux guerres, ses inquiétudes, ses hésitations, ses hontes et ses remords seraient fort précieux pour l'étude des mœurs françaises après la chute du Second Empire. Cet homme s'était taillé un avenir à sa mesure, culotté, boucané, résigné, surchargé de signes, de rendez-vous, de projets. Un petit avenir historique et mortel.' Seeing two sides to every question paralyzes action, and when faced with the necessity of making a decision which might affect his whole life he thinks: 'Est-ce que les jeux sont faits? Est-ce que je ne suis plus qu'un fonctionnaire?' Il avait attendu si longtemps; ses dernières années n'avaient été qu'une veille d'armes. Il attendait à travers mille petits soucis quotidiens; . . . son unique soin avait été de se garder disponible. Pour un acte. Un acte libre et réfléchi, qui engagerait toute sa vie, et qui serait au commencement d'une existence nouvelle. Il n'avait jamais pu se prendre complètement à un amour, à un plaisir, il n'avait jamais été vraiment malheureux: il lui semblait toujours qu'il était ailleurs, qu'il n'était pas encore né tout à fait. Il attendait . . . Il avait songé à partir pour la Russie, à laisser tomber ses études, à apprendre un métier manuel. Mais ce que l'avait retenu . . . c'est qu'il manquait de *raisons* pour le faire. Et il avait continué à attendre . . . ' Thus Mathieu's devotion to his liberty deprives him of it, for he is no longer free to act.

During these two days the lives of the other important characters in the book are all working towards some crisis. Ivich is waiting to hear the results of an examination, which if she fails means that she must leave Paris and live in the Provinces with her parents; her brother Boris, who is thinking up ways of leaving his mistress, the night club singer, and Daniel, Mathieu's friend, whose personal psychological crises have reached the point where he must make some gesture to break through the horror of his neuroses. The pattern of the interaction between them is like a game of chess in its last stages. Each has a wide field of action but is barred from enjoying it by one other piece, and the moves, always based on a misunderstanding of the opponent's game, are largely made to foil non-existent manoeuvres.

The other important character in the book, is Daniel, the beautiful self-loathing homosexual, whom no one can hate because they must see him across his appearance, and yet whose whole life is a search for someone who, by hating him, will satisfy his sense of guilt. He execrates his friends because they are unable to know him as he is, he despises the 'toughs' with whom he sleeps because they defer to his money and his class, his goal is the perfect self-punishment but, even could he discover it, he knows that will be useless unless he can convince someone else of its validity. It is Mathieu that he most hates, for his mediocrity of temperament will always prevent him from knowing Daniel for what he is, and, as a means of revenge, he has secretly become the friend of Mathieu's mistress, Marcelle. 'Ha, s'il pouvait crever, mais non, il se promène en liberté avec son opinion sur moi au fond de la tête et il en infecte tous ceux qui l'approchent, il faudrait courir partout et gratter; gratter, effacer, laver à grand eau, j'ai gratté Marcelle jusqu'à l'os. Elle m

tendu la main, le premier jour en me regardant beaucoup, elle m'a dit: 'Mathieu m'a si souvent parlé de vous'. Et je l'ai regardée à mon tour, j'étais fasciné j'étais *là-dedans*, j'existais dans cette chair, derrière ce front buté, au fond de ces yeux, salope! A présent, elle ne croit plus un mot de ce qu'il lui dit sur moi.' When Mathieu tries to borrow money for the abortion from him, Daniel refuses, thinking that this will force Mathieu to marry Marcelle and thus have to destroy his carefully preserved *liberté*, but in the end it is Daniel who marries her, because he sees in this gesture the perfect torture he has been looking for. But he has to tell Mathieu why he is doing it, so that someone else should *know*, and *L'âge de Raison* ends in a strange scene between the two men in which Daniel announces his intentions and at the same time confesses his inclinations. Mathieu 'était fasciné par Daniel. Il pensait 'Est-ce que c'est ça la liberté? Il a *agi*: à présent, il ne peut plus revenir en arrière: ça doit lui sembler étrange de sentir derrière lui un acte inconnu, qu'il ne comprend déjà presque plus et qui va bouleverser sa vie. Moi tout ce que je fais, je le fais *pour rien*; on dirait qu'on me vole les suites de mes actes; tout se passe comme si je pouvais toujours reprendre mes coups. Je ne sais pas ce que je donnerais pour faire un acte irremédiable.'

When Daniel goes he is left alone—without Ivich, without his mistress, the whole brouhaha of the last two days has evaporated, 'Je reste seul, mais pas plus libre qu'auparavant. . . . Personne n'a entravé ma liberté, c'est ma vie qui l'a buc. Mathieu has reached the age of reason.

It would seem that the central theme of Sartre's book is to reconcile the solitude of man with the solidarity of society. Man is alone but he cannot live alone, he must have other individuals through whom he can know himself, but they, too, are pursuing their solitary paths, and although their witness is vital it is always false. Each person has his own executioner in the form of the other person he most wishes to convince. Daniel says 'Tout, j'ai toujours tout fait pour un témoin, sans témoin j'évapore', and it is particularly appropriate that having discovered that his marriage to Marcelle, instead of being a torture is rather pleasant, he should finally turn to God, the one perfect spy whom man has created in his own image, the only person who will really efface the appalling fact that ' . . . L'horreur c'est toujours pour le lendemain. Moi marié, moi soldat: je ne trouve que moi. Même pas moi: une suite de petites courses excentriques, de petits mouvements centrifuges et pas de centre. Pourtant il y a un centre. Un centre: moi, *Moi*—et l'horreur est au centre.' And yet, since the individual cannot be alone he must live his life and accept his responsibility towards these others; he can only be free when he is able to make his life as it is able to make him.

*Le Sursis* enlarges the scope of *L'âge de Raison*. The action takes place in the week before the Munich conference, and several new characters are introduced to give a better feeling of the interdependence of their lives and international events. Although we know now how that great heatwave panic ended, its horror quickly returns and we are made to realize how much the war had to happen: how much it was necessary to the lives of so many people. As Boris says: ' . . . c'est *ma* guerre. C'est elle qui m'a fait, c'est moi qui la ferai; nous sommes inséparables; je ne peux même pas m'imaginer ce que je serais si elle n'avait pas dû éclater. Il pensa à sa vie et il ne lui parut plus qu'elle était

trop courte: les vies ne sont ni courtes ni longues. C'était une vie, voilà tout. Avec la guerre au bout. Il se sentit tout à coup revêtu d'une dignité nouvelle, parce qu'il avait une fonction dans la Société est aussi parce qu'il allait périr de mort violente et il fut gêné dans sa modestie.'

To Mathieu the War is his first freedom, and in the crowded train full of mobilized soldiers, his thoughts sum up the conclusions of these two volumes: 'Un corps énorme, une planète, dans un espace à cent millions de dimensions; les êtres à trois dimensions ne pouvaient même pas l'imaginer. Et pourtant chaque dimension était une conscience autonome. Si on essayait de regarder la planète en face, elle s'effondrait en miettes, il ne restait plus que des consciences. Cent millions de consciences libres dont chacune voyait des murs, un bout de cigare rougeoyant, des visages familiers, et construisait sa destinée sous sa propre responsabilité. Et pourtant, si l'on était une de ces consciences, on s'apercevait à d'imperceptibles effleurements, à d'insensibles changements, qu'on était solidaire d'un gigantesque et invisible polypier. La guerre: chacun est libre et pourtant les jeux sont faits.'

It is doubtful whether reading these two books will give the reader a clearer idea of what the tenets of existentialism really are, but it will certainly introduce him into the mental atmosphere surrounding this philosophy. If in future we are still chary of using the noun, the adjective will probably come in very handy. We owe a debt of gratitude to M. Sartre, for he has attempted to give back stature to the novel by drawing his characters against a larger background and by facing up to moral problems through them, thus breaking away from the too prevalent tendency in fiction to concentrate on an exquisite sensibility without bothering to base it on anything. But the trouble with *Les Chemins de la Liberté*, so far, is that the philosophy is incompletely integrated and so the book is liable to fail as a work of art. The characters seldom if ever, come alive. Although he is writing about a group of people, they rapidly become marionettes twirled around on the strings of his philosophy, and while we can appreciate their *predicaments*, they themselves remain shadowy, rather boring, prototypes. It is impossible to discuss the book fully in its incomplete form. What M. Sartre is going to do with his characters is still his affair, but the indications are that their problems will be solved, and this may be one of the reasons for the dissatisfaction which lurks in the book. The success of his previous works has been very largely due to the complete unity and directness of the thought behind it. In *Huis Clos* there was no deviation from the idea that *l'enfer c'est les autres*, and if this means that paradise can equally well be *les autres* it was not allowed to mitigate the damnation of the characters, and this conviction gave the work an artistic form to which its success is largely due. But to make the damnation and saving of your characters possible in the same book requires that they should be real human beings—philosophically it only implies a fault in the argument. To create a work of art you must be true to your medium.

There is however, one brilliantly successful character in the book, Ivich. Perhaps because in face of that youth which is its own excuse Sartre did not feel compelled to raise any further problems, he has given us a perfect portrait of what he calls 'les jeunes sacrées', the beautiful, inarticulate, death-wishing young, never finishing their sentences, disliking all the drinks brought for

them, but always ending by getting tight, the eternal executioners of the middle-aged and old whom they despise, peering obliquely at their victims through a cloud of hair, across a pool in which only one image is reflected—their own.

Although there are scenes—such as the one in the night club—so competently handled that one can only admire, it is significant that out of so long a book one can recall no passage memorable for the quality of the writing, and this is indeed a disconcerting departure from all M. Sartre's previous books.

*Le Sang des Autres.* By Simone de Beauvoir. Gallimard. Paris. 105 francs.

THE reader who would like to know a little more about existentialism without bothering to read the philosophical treatises on the subject had better draw a deep breath and take a plunge into Madame de Beauvoir's novel. From the word 'go' her characters wrestle with the problems of their existence and no respite is given either to them or to us until they emerge, battered but triumphant, with the answer.

Madame de Beauvoir takes as her text '*Chacun est responsable de tout devant tous*' and her hero, who for obvious freudian reasons, is harassed by a sense of guilt moves from his childhood conviction that his trouble is due to 'la faute d'être un autre' and 'parceque' j'existe. Est-ce que je ne peux pas feindre que je n'existe pas? Je m'efface du monde, j'efface mon visage et ma voix, j'efface mes traces, to the understanding that 'Je ne peux pas m'effacer. Je ne peux pas me retirer en moi. J'existe hors de moi et partout dans le monde: il n'est pas un pouce de ma route qui n'empiète sur la route d'un autre: il n'y a aucune manière d'être qui puisse m'empêcher de me déborder moi-même a chaque instant. Cette vie que je tisse avec ma propre substance, elle offre aux autres hommes mille faces inconnues, elle traverse impetueusement leur destin ...' and so finally to the discovery that 'Je n'échapperai pas à la malédiction: à jamais je resterai pour eux un autre, à jamais je serai pour eux la force aveugle de la fatalité, à jamais séparé d'eux. Mais que seulement je m'emploie à défendre ce bien suprême qui rend innocents et vains tous les pierres et tous les rocs, ce bien qui sauve chaque homme de tous les autres et de moi-même: la liberté: alors, ma passion n'aura pas été inutile. Tu ne m'as pas donné la paix: mais pourquoi voudrais-je la paix? tu m'as donné le courage d'accepter à jamais le risque et l'angoisse, de supporter mes crimes et le remords qui me déchirera sans fin. Il n'y a pas d'autre route.'

From this book one gets the impression that Madame de Beauvoir could probably give a clear and simple explanation of a complicated philosophical proposition, i.e. that she is a born demagogue, but if in Sartre's novel the philosophy tends to be incompletely integrated, Madame de Beauvoir has simply made no attempt at all at integration. In between the solid layers of philosophizing she has placed a touching little tale of a girl who goes all out to get the man she wants, jilting a nice but not very passionate fiancé in the process. When she has managed to persuade the reluctant object of her choice to accept her attentions it is only to quarrel because she refuses to understand the masculine importance of being in the trenches during a War; but they finally get together again when she becomes a member of the Resistance Movement

of which he is a leader. Their happiness is cut short as she gets herself killed in an expedition to save her ex-fiancé from the Germans, leaving the desolate hero making the concluding speech—quoted above—over her dead body. This half of the book is in a well-known genre and would have a solid success with the typing-pool who, having got it in the lunch-hour, would be having a cosy 'weep' by tea-time in the comfortable assurance that all men were strong and silent and all girls chattering idiots but that it didn't matter much anyway because 'true love wins in the end'.

If Madame de Beauvoir's complete absence of humour was not so obvious one might be inclined to treat *Le Sang des Autres* as a parody of the existential novel. It would be fascinating to find out how often the words '*j'existe*', '*existence*', etc., were used in proportion to any other.

Somewhere behind this book lurks a disquieting element of hysteria; the hysteria that is the artist's worst enemy because it turns him once more into a small child abandoned by his mother and calling, like Dostoevsky's child, on 'good, kind God' to help him. It is an element that has always had its devotees among those addicted to the Absolute, but which so far has never been associated with the courageous, humane and astringent tradition of which Sartre himself has hitherto been so formidable an exponent, and through which France has always been willing to give so much to the world.

SONIA BROWNELL

*Tomorrow will be Different.* By Paschoal Carlos Magno. 88 pp. Constable. 3s. 6d.

This is a moderately skilful play by a Brazilian author who, according to R. J. Minney in the introduction, gave us a 'dazzling glimpse' of Brazil in his novel *Sun Over the Palms*. Senhor Magno continues to reveal more of what goes on in that vast country known to us mainly, we must admit, through its rumba music, coffee-producing terra roxa, minerals from Minas Geraes and through slushy praise of the physical charms of Rio. We are taken to a white-man's household in modern Brazil where the father (Antonio) is nothing but a lazy, penniless *roué* living on his white-man's prerogatives and *conquistador* complex and the mother (Vera) an empty-headed former *can-can* dancer. The decadence of this household, which depends on the earnings of some of the children to make both ends meet, is remarkable not only in that we become uncomfortably aware that it is the heritage of the Old World. The conflicts of the children in such a dead-end atmosphere are trivial. One dreams of being a dancer, another writes popular music which eventually gives him fame and fortune because of the publicity of some scandal in which he is suspected of murdering his lover. But it is left to Clara, the sturdiest child, to provide the significance of the play. She marries a mulatto (who gets killed in an accident) and gives birth to his child. Clara, we feel, has sensed the retrogressive, empty glory of those who have brought the worst forms of vanity and pretentiousness to the Western Hemisphere. She wishes to break this line of decadence by her love for her fine and intelligent mulatto. But when she is alone with her little black son, her spirit fails her. She leaves it in a foundling home. Another character, Bã, the black nanny who had nursed Antonio and all his children, strikes us as being a truly matriarchal figure. From her primitive wisdom and earnest heart springs a

New World humanism. But Bá cannot forgive Clara for abandoning her child, and she dies broken-hearted, leaving Clara to repent and prepared to claim her son again.

If we are to be good Europeans, we cannot afford to be too proud and must turn our attention to any morsel of light and sentience outside our own battered geographic and cultural zones. Senhor Magno, the dramatist, is not a Latin American Ibsen or Brieux, but his play holds a special message for us now, confronted as we are with our failure to stop race-suicide and the breakdown in our humanity. He is a propagandist, and as such he may be exaggerating certain claims. Nevertheless, he will make some of us realize that Brazil, with her approximately 40 per cent mestizo, Negro and Indian population, and such figures as Aleijadino and the Minas poets of Ouro Preto, might offer an example of humanism and courage to the world. Quite a few critics, as well as the producer of this play, Basil Ashmore, think that this is a Tchekovian piece, but such comparison is neither fair to the genius of Tchekov nor the intentions of Senhor Magno. There is little of the Slavonic hysteria and cynicism peculiar to feudal Russia here. Clara says to her mother: 'I know what father has made you suffer, and the aunts and uncles with their past glory . . . living on pensions and pawn tickets. Whispering, malicious ghosts. What do we care about the opinion, the conventions of dead people. We're *alive*, mother!' We hope so.

HUGO MANNING

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE gives a long interview to Christian Grisoli to clarify some of the most discussed points in his philosophy and the meaning of his latest novel. This conversation is reported in the December number of *Paru* in which there also appears an interview with Jacques Madaule, questioned by F. Tourret, on his conception of French history.

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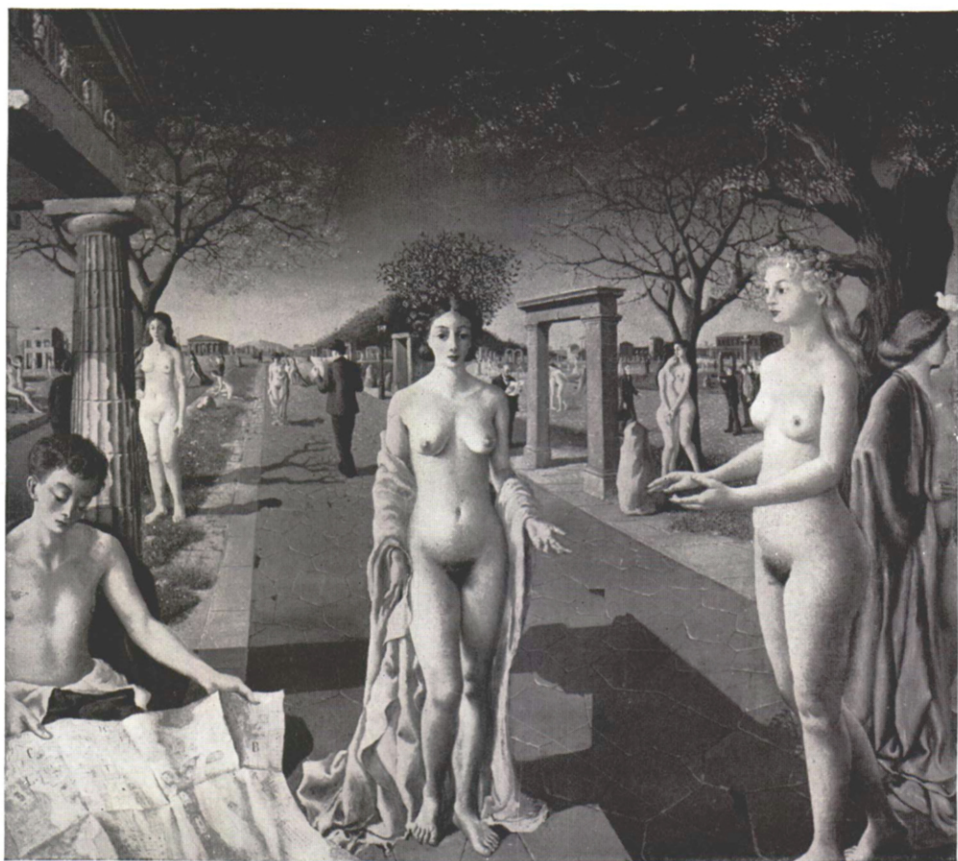


Le village des Sirènes. Coll. *Théo Léger*





La prisonnière. Coll. P. G. Van Hecke



*'L'Entrée de la Ville.'* Coll. R. Giron



Femmes devant la mer. Coll. Lou Cosyn



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